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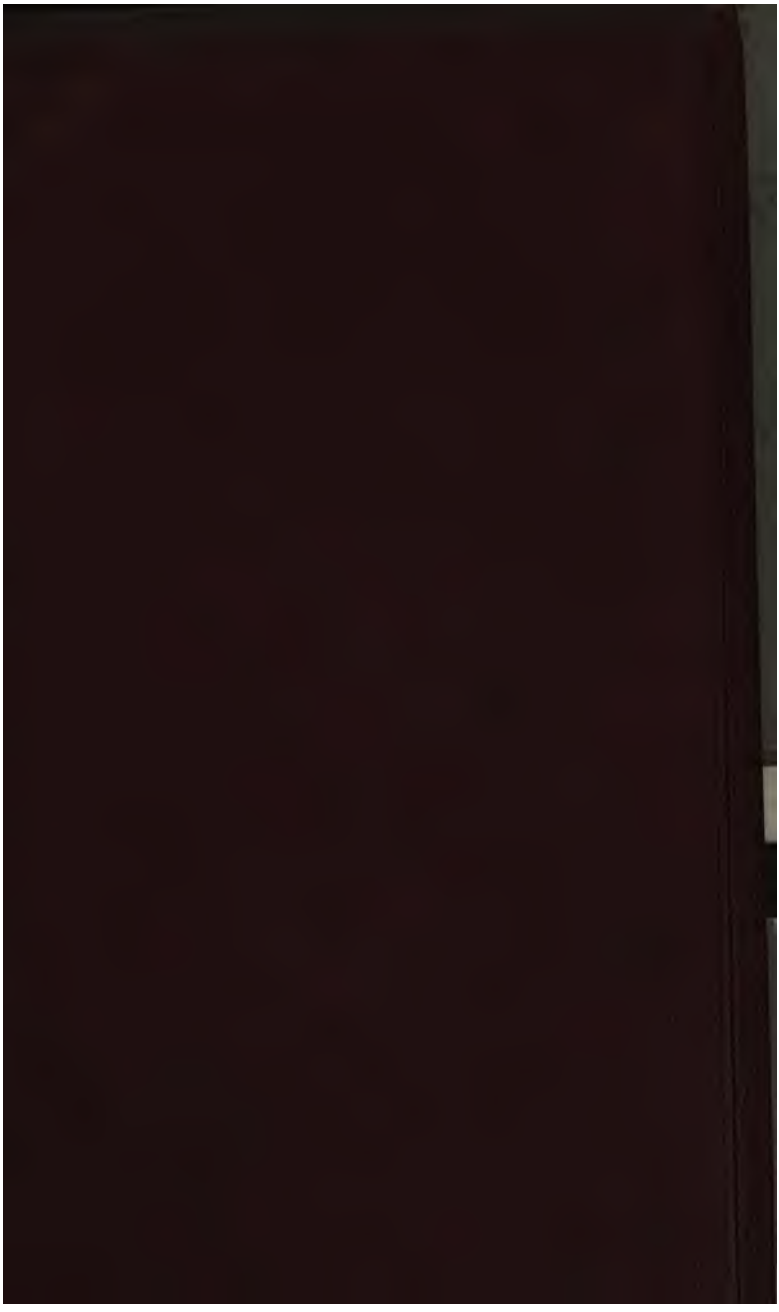

CHRIST THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

ALEXANDER STRAHAN

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CHRIST THE LIGHT OF THE WORLD

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I.

WHY HE CAME.

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."—1 Tim. i. 15.

"Ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins."—1 John iii. 5.

TWO Apostles speak here.

The one says, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners. The other says, that He was manifested to take away our sins.

Men perplex and weary themselves with the question, Why must Christ come? Why could not God, by an act of free pardon, and by an act of entire sanctification, do all that is needful for the restoration and salvation of man? Why this complex machinery, of a Saviour and a Sanctifier, a redemption and a mediation, a tardy and oftentimes discouraging process of converting and trans-

forming grace—when the absolute will of an Omnipotent God might either have prevented the fall, or necessitated the rising?

Such questions will sometimes force themselves upon the mind and heart of the thoughtful. It may not be altogether wrong to ponder them, provided there be two things always found along with that pondering; (1) a deep humility, conscious of inability to fathom God's counsels; and (2) an earnest resolution to deal practically rather than theoretically with the subject; to work out our own salvation with fear and trembling, in the use of means which God has provided, and in the pursuit of an end which God has proposed.

What was the object of Christ's coming, of God's manifestation of Himself in the person of his Son Jesus Christ? is an enquiry always instructive, always quickening; while the speculation as to the necessity of a Redeemer, as to the prior probability of God's rescuing man through the sacrifice and mediation of a Divine but incarnate Saviour, may wait, together with the great mystery of the origin of evil, until man, rescued and glorified, shall be permitted to read God's secrets in the bright light of God's countenance.

Now therefore we have before us two answers to that ever-profitable enquiry, What was the object, the practical aim and end, of his coming—of the manifestation (as St. John calls it) of the Son of God?

1. St. Paul, in his 1st Epistle to Timothy, is writing to a very dear friend. He calls him his own son in the faith; for to him that younger friend owed, under God, his conversion and salvation.

On some occasion, after St. Paul's release from his first imprisonment at Rome—in which the history of the Acts leaves him—he had left Timothy at Ephesus in charge of the congregations.

Describing here the purpose of this commission, St. Paul speaks of a tendency in those times to an unprofitable style of teaching; an attention to what he calls "fables and endless genealogies"—some of the manifold offshoots of a late and corrupted Judaism—against which he desires his friend earnestly to protest. The real end, he says, of the Gospel charge is love; love, not in the form of a vague benevolence or philanthropy, but as the product of a pure heart, a good conscience, and a sincere faith. Others have swerved from this true

doctrine, and gone back to the Law. Forgetting the very use of law—which is the coercion of transgressors—the suppression, by threatening and by penalty, of those sins and crimes into which fallen nature is ever thrusting the unregenerate. But the Gospel was sent to bring men out of this state of unregenerate nature, into a higher region of faith and love, which is wholly unsuitable to the operation of mere law; a region in which man, raised out of the bondage of flesh and sense, by the indwelling presence of God's Holy Spirit, is enabled to desire and to endeavour, day by day, to show forth the praises of Him who has thus called him out of darkness into his marvellous light.

The mention of the Gospel suggests to St. Paul's mind a thankful recollection of his own share in it. Christ has appointed him to a ministry: once "a blasphemer, a persecutor, and injurious," he had now obtained mercy, that he might be an example to others, to the very end of time, of the forgiving grace and love of Christ.

Such is the connection in which the former text stands. "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners; of whom I am chief."

"To save sinners." Could there be a briefer, or a more explicit, or a more attractive statement of the aim of Christ's coming?

Who is a sinner? He is one who (as the original word expresses it) has missed the mark; has failed to hit the object and aim of his being: one who was created for a definite purpose, and has not answered it: one who was designed for a certain work and a certain end, and has neither done the one nor reached the other. That is a sinner. Need we particularize the work set to God's creatures, or the destiny proposed to them? "This people have I formed for myself: they shall show forth my praise." It is the object of creation, in all its parts, to show forth what God is. The material creation, in its marvellous structure, its multifarious beauty, its strange combination of variety and order, its exact adaptation to the wants and enjoyments of its inhabitants, its silent but most eloquent testimony to the hand that made and to the hand that sustains, shows forth what God is in his power, in his wisdom, in the vastness of his conception, and in the minuteness of his care. This part of creation has not sinned, has not missed its aim. "The heavens declare the

glory of God, and the firmament showeth his handiwork. One day telleth another, and one night certifieth another. There is neither speech nor language, but their voices are heard among them. Their sound is gone out into all lands, and their words into the ends of the world."

But the rational, the moral, the spiritual creation —what of it? That part of it with which we are concerned, of which we all are constituent parts, the race of man—what of it? Has it answered its purpose? Has it continued to reflect God's glory? Has it uniformly and with one voice declared his praise? Made originally in God's image, after God's likeness—endowed with reason, with conscience, with the knowledge of duty, with will and action, with the power of communication with its kind and of communion with its God—having the favour of God proposed as its present blessing, and the presence of God as its eternal home—how has this privileged race demeaned itself? In what condition do we behold it? in what condition do we find it in ourselves? Broken loose—gone from its proper centre—disloyal to its rightful owner—pretending to a liberty which is no honour, and an independence which is no happiness—saying, "My

powers are my own—who is lord over me?" that is its state, if nothing worse! The creature is trying to live alone: the thing formed, instead of reflecting and loving to reflect, its Maker's image—instead of delighting to make mention, and to promote the mention, of One whose it is and whom it serves—aims rather to "be as God;" to be admired and obeyed and loved for itself; to have its own home, and its own work, and its own pleasure, and to forget, while it may, "the rock whence it was hewn, and the hole of the pit whence it was digged." Can any word better express its condition, than that which calls it a sinner—a being that has missed the mark, and fallen short of the aim with which it was created?

And if this be its state, what is its destiny? Can this disloyal, this rebellious, this self-exalting thing, enter, when it dies, the home of holiness, of love, of God? Powers used through a lifetime in pampering self and dishonouring God—faculties debased to self-worship, and affections enchained to earth—a mind immersed in paltry cares, and a heart deluged with impurity and idolatry—does all this prognosticate, is all this compatible with, a happy entrance at death into the inheritance of the

saints in light? Where is the promise of that miracle of a sudden transformation from one condition into its very opposite, amidst the last agonies and mysteries of dissolution, which alone could introduce a being thus debased into the glory of those unfallen spirits whose natural home is the presence-chamber of God? St. Paul combines, as by an obvious link of coherence, the two brief clauses, "All have sinned—and come short" (as the necessary consequence) "of the glory of God."

This then is a sinner. He is one who has missed the mark of being; has failed to answer his purpose, alike in work and in destiny; has turned aside from setting forth God's praise, and from walking in the way which leads to glory.

Such were they whom the coming of Christ Jesus into the world contemplated. "To save sinners." "I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance." If we do not recognize ourselves in the description, then neither can we see ourselves in the object. If we do not feel ourselves to have first missed the mark, then neither does Christ come to us with the offer of his salvation.

St. Paul could see himself in the description. "Sinners," he says, "of whom I am chief." Yes,

each one of us knows more of himself than he can possibly know of any other. When he takes into account, that which he alone knows, the opportunities and the warnings and the mercies and forbearances which have marked his course, and then also the follies and the perversenesses and the backslidings and the obstinacies by which he has gone astray and done wickedly; he feels indeed, that, however it may be with others, he can without affectation take upon his lips St. Paul's confession, and say that, if Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, He came to save those of whom he, he himself, is chief.

Surely it is sweet to us to listen to this brief saying—"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners!" To save those who had missed the mark, and come short as much of happiness as of holiness. To restore to peace with God those who had broken it by their sins. To knit again in a bond of tender affection children who had left their Father's home, and were wasting his goods, in selfish misery, in a distant and desolate country. To make God known, and near, and present, in all his longsuffering and in all his love, to those whose wretchedness it was to have lost sight of

Him, and to have flung away all assurance of his concern for them and of his will to bless. To take away the sting of death, and to bring life and immortality to light by his Gospel.

Yes, and in order to this—for without it we lose the surest basis and the tenderest tie of all—in order to this, to take our sins upon Him, and by dying, to make propitiation for iniquity. Christ the sacrifice—the sacrifice not to wrath but of love—the gift given, out of boundless compassion, by Him who so loved us that He spared not his own Son from dying on our behalf, so making peace—Christ the sacrifice of the Father's love, must go before Christ the Resurrection, Christ the Mediator, and Christ the Life. When He came to save sinners, He came first to die for them: He came first to be "the propitiation for our sins; and not for ours only, but also for the sins of the whole world."

2. The last words are St. John's; and with the sound of them yet in our ears, we can turn without fear to that other side of the revelation, which is furnished to us by the same loving teacher in the second of the texts above written. "Ye know that He was manifested to take away our sins."

St. John had an evident dread of all self-deception. He lived on into a comparatively late day of the Church; and witnessed the growth of many of those errors which were to be the scourge and the torment of its onward history. No man had a more deep insight into the love which passeth knowledge: no man had a more anxious apprehension of the perversions which might distort that boundless love into a pretext for indifference to sin.

This third chapter of the Epistle (to go no further) exemplifies sufficiently this twofold characteristic.

"Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God. . . Beloved, now are we the sons of God, and it doth not yet appear what we shall be: but we know that, when He shall appear, we shall be like Him; for we shall see Him as He is." What then? Shall we presume upon that bright hope? Shall we say, I am safe for time, and safe for eternity—I shall never be moved? Hearken. "And every man that hath this hope in Him (Christ) purifieth himself, even as He is pure. Whosoever committeth sin, transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law. And ye know

that He was manifested to take away our sins; and in Him is no sin. Whosoever abideth in Him sinneth not: whosoever sinneth hath not seen Him, neither known Him. Little children, let no man deceive you: he that doeth righteousness is righteous, even as He is righteous. He that committeth sin is of the devil; for the devil sinneth from the beginning. For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."

You see the trembling anxiety to keep together the love and the holiness—the hope and the purity—the sin-bearing and the sin-removal. He was manifested to take away our sins . . . manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil . . . He that doeth righteousness is righteous . . . He that committeth sin is of the devil.

There have been those in all times who have too much sought to put asunder things which God has made one. They have spoken as if it militated against the freedom and the fulness of the Gospel grace, if one word were said about Gospel holiness. And we know well that holiness may be so dwelt upon, as to sever it from its one motive and from its one source and spring. In that same

degree the exhortation is powerless, because in that same degree it has ceased to be the Gospel. But I can never understand how any sincere person should shrink from that preaching of holiness which is itself a Gospel. If I say, You must make yourselves holy, either to earn God's love, or in return for God's love to you; then indeed I speak without Christ, and the heart of the hearer is deaf and dead to my call. But if I say, with the blessed Apostle St. John, Christ was manifested to take away our sins; Christ was manifested to destroy in us the works of the devil; his name was called Jesus, because He shall save his people from their sins—then surely the word is as persuasive as it is scriptural: I tell you of One who knows your weakness as He knows your guilt, and as He provided for the one by his death, so provides for the other by his life.

There is no one amongst us—may God grant it—who deliberately expects both to keep his sin and yet to reach heaven. The heart is thus far true within, that it bears decisive witness against a conversion which is no change, against a justification which brings after it no sanctification. Nevertheless there is such a thing in all of us as a lazy,

listless, lifeless acquiescence in a perpetual defeat, in small things or great, by the power of evil; a perpetual postponement of the struggle with, of the victory over, sin; a practical resting upon the Atonement, either in the present or in the future, as something which shall make up for all else, and carry the soul, however earthly and sin-bound, safely across the boundary line at last between death and life. Without presuming to expect to keep our sins and yet to be saved, there is a power in habit, and a readiness to rest, and a dislike to steady toil and protracted conflict, which may make us practically take one half of the Gospel and leave the other; believe that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, and yet forget that for this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might take away our sins, and destroy, in us individually, the works of the devil.

Let it not be so any more, beloved friends, with us. Take the whole Gospel. Each half of it is to be prized above gold or precious stone. Not least, surely, that half of it which says, It was the object of Jesus Christ, in coming down from heaven for us men and for our salvation, to take away, to remove, to destroy in us, all that is sinful, all that is

bad in us and base and sensual and devilish. He knew what He undertook, and He has strength to do it. Commit yourself to Him for this purpose. If this was his object in coming, that He might destroy the works of the devil, then surely He will not disappoint his own aim in any one who seriously looks to Him for strength. In the power to resist and conquer sin you will read the assurance of forgiveness and justification. "Let no man deceive you," St. John writes—the Holy Ghost that was in him providing thus for the warning and admonition of our own distant times —"he that doeth righteousness is righteous;" not he who has passed through certain experiences or certain excitements; not he who has felt certain feelings or suffered certain sufferings or seen certain sights; not he who has the liveliest impression of the sovereignty of grace or of the omnipotence of the Redeemer: but he who is enabled to show his faith in his works; he who is renewed day by day through the indwelling Spirit for the performance of duty and for the contest with sin; he who by pureness, by meekness, by the Holy Ghost, by love unfeigned, fights the good fight of faith, and brings the whole body

of sin into subjection. He who came into the world to save sinners, was manifested also to take away our sins.

3. Two or three words of application will suggest themselves on a general view of this great subject.

(1) The truth of God, and the work of grace, is one, not many.

We portion and parcel out Gospel doctrine—we divide and subdivide, distinguish and re-distinguish —until we are in danger of losing the original unity in a self-made multiplicity. Just as in reference to our human nature, we talk of mind and soul, of heart and head, of judgment and will, affection and imagination, till we are almost in danger of forgetting that these distinctions are conventional, not essential; so in the great matters of divine revelation, we discriminate nicely between forgiveness and grace, justification and sanctification, adoption and assimilation, as though it were possible for one of these things really to exist without another; as though it might be, in conception at least, that the same man were justified, yet not sanctified; that one should have by itself the grace of forgiveness, and another, by

itself, the grace of a spiritual influence. St. John's strong words, in sound almost truisms, have their everlasting significance in reference to such misapplications of doctrine: "He that doeth righteousness is righteous," and "He that committeth sin is of the devil." He whom God justifies, He also sanctifies: he whose life is still stained with sin, hath not upon him as yet the mark of the divine forgiveness. God's work in man has a unity as well as a detail: the work of Christ and the work of the Spirit move ever in harmony: and where one element of grace is really, there are all its elements in root and in germ. He who is forgiven is also following: "but ye are sanctified" is ever found in combination with "but ye are justified." He who came to save sinners was manifested also to take away our sins.

(2) Again, all that is really a part of the divine Gospel is alike encouraging to the sincere enquirer.

It is all in the form of promise. I will give. I come to do this or that. Ask of me, and I will grant. Nothing is thrown upon us, but that which the weakest and the humblest can best perform; to believe, to ask, to wait, and to accept.

Again, it satisfies not one part, but both parts, of our conscious need.

There are times when the sense of guilt is our pressing trouble. This conscience, stained again by some old and (as we had hoped) already vanquished sin, is restless, clamorous, and will not be pacified. What shall appease it? What but a sacrifice infinite in its value, everlasting in its efficacy—the knowledge of a divine Saviour dying for human sin, and bearing once for all upon himself the iniquities of us all? Sprinkle afresh upon the conscience the blood of Christ, and He, He himself, will say to its accusing voice, Peace, be still!

And certainly there are times when the sense of sinfulness—not the remembrance of past sin, but the consciousness of present sin—is the predominant misery. I see before me this difficult duty, to which I am unequal: who shall give me strength? I see before me this terrible temptation, often before found resistless: who shall tread it down? My own heart misgives me; the traitor inclination is my enemy within: who shall give the better desire a chance of resisting? Who is that stronger than the strong man armed, who shall

take from him his armour and divide his spoils? Then the voice of Christ's Gospel sounds acceptably in our ears, For this purpose Christ came, that He might take away our sins: For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy in us the works of the devil. Put thy trust in Him, and He will give thee the victory!

We cannot believe in a sincere man being desirous of forgiveness and not desirous of holiness. A Gospel which proclaimed an unconditional pardon, but said nothing of an indwelling and inworking Spirit, would be no Gospel to him whose desire it is not only to escape God's punishment, but to be made capable of God's presence, and receptive of God's love.

(3) Finally, the Gospel revelation, and the call of God's grace, is one always seasonable, never out of place.

There is not one person upon earth who is not addressed by it. Because there is not one person who is not a sinner. And there is not one moment in the life of any man, when he does not want the Gospel. Week by week, on the blessed Christian Sunday, are gathered together, in the churches of

Christendom, a number of human beings. No one can look upon such an assembly unmoved. What a history is recorded upon the memory of those who listen! What a burden, of sin and care and sorrow, is carried thither time after time upon the hearts of the worshippers! What a load of past sins—some perhaps still lived in—some perhaps done over and over again, most days or all days—some to be taken with them to their beds at night, and risen with yet again in the morning! Yes, He who is greater than our hearts must look with displeasure, we fear, upon some of us his nominal worshippers. And then the *prospect* of sin! I tremble even more at the thought of the sin which God sees that I shall commit, than at the thought of that which He has already recorded! It seems so terrible that I who am now kneeling in penitence before God, praying for mercy and grace, should be known by Him, who sees the end from the beginning, to be unconsciously on the very verge of a repetition of that sin against which I am praying! It is enough to make a man serious, to think of such things; and to think of them as multiplied by hundreds and tens of hundreds in the persons of those who sit together in God's

presence decorous, grave, and (as it should seem) for the moment earnest. Then I say that the Gospel can never be out of place, at any moment, to such a congregation and to the individuals composing it. We want it every moment. We want it to keep us from despair. Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am one—yes, may we not well say it? of whom I am chief. We want it to keep us from carelessness. He was manifested to take away our sins: can it be a trifle then, this sin which we commit thus lightly? a trifle to go against Christ—to tread under foot the Son of God, and do despite to the Spirit of grace? We want it for life: it is the only thing which can make life safe or sacred or happy—this faith in One above who died for us and lives again—died to save sinners—lives to take away sins! We want it, O most of all, for death: for that death which is so busy amongst us; which gives us so little notice, and waits not, when it comes, either for the comfort of the surviving or for the repentance of the departing. Surely we shall want the Gospel then; with its message of forgiveness and of reconciliation, of death vanquished and immortality revealed! And if we

would have it then, we must find it now. A death-bed may be a good ending, but it is a bad beginning, of the work of grace: and he who would die happy must first have lived holy. Awake then now, thou that sleepest! arise from the dead, and Christ shall give thee light!

II.

THE LAMP AND THE LIGHT.

"We have also a more sure word of prophecy; whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts."—2 Peter i. 19.

T. PETER, expecting the approach of that end of life, which his risen Lord had predicted to him, is anxious, before his decease, to secure to the Churches one last testimony to the truth which had made him free. He would assure them, with the earnestness of a dying man, that the Gospel which he had taught, and in which they were walking, was no cunningly devised fable. When the Apostles made known to their converts "the power and coming of the Lord Jesus Christ," they did so, not by conjecture, not even on the strength of a probability however great or an

inference however conclusive, but as "eye-witnesses of that majesty" which they asserted. They had seen with their eyes, and heard with their ears, that which attested the Advent.

In such impressive terms does he speak—and no wonder—of one particular scene in the earthly life of Christ, which he, with two other men, had been privileged to witness. He takes as it were for his text the great miracle of the Transfiguration. He, with the two sons of Zebedee, James and John, had been taken aside from the rest, shortly after a remarkable prophecy that some of those standing there should not taste of death, till they had seen a "coming in power" of the kingdom of God; and, being led up into a mountain apart, had seen their Master gloriously transfigured, changed in fashion and aspect, before them, his face shining as the sun, and his raiment glistering with a preternatural light. In the presence of this astounding transformation, there appeared in glory two persons long since passed away from the earth, Moses the Lawgiver of the Old Dispensation, and Elijah the chief and representative of the Prophets. They were seen and heard, talking with Jesus. Their topic of

discourse was that mysterious close and consummation of the work of Redemption (St. Luke says), "the decease which Christ should accomplish at Jerusalem." In the midst of such discourse, the minds of the three spectators overwhelmed all the time with fear and wonder, a bright luminous cloud passed over the scene; and out of it came an audible voice, saying, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased." "This is my beloved Son: hear Him."

One who had witnessed such an event could never forget it: and well might St. Peter, in the close of life, speak of it as he speaks in words preceding the text, "He received from God the Father honour and glory, when there came such a voice to Him from the excellent glory," from the exceeding bright light which betokened God's presence, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. And this voice which came from heaven we heard, when we were with Him in the holy mount."

His words are before us; surely to your ear, sincere, earnest, heart-felt words, if words were ever such: it is for us to ponder them, and God grant us grace to receive in its simplicity the truth which they disclose!

The text draws the inference. "We have also a more sure word of prophecy:" or more exactly, "And we have more sure the prophetic word;" we have the word of the prophets confirmed, made more certain and stedfast, by the testimony borne to Christ at the Transfiguration.

"The prophetic word." A Prophet is one who speaks by God's commission in God's behalf. Prediction strictly so called is no essential part of his name or of his office. Some of the prophets of the Old Testament uttered scarcely one, if one, prediction. But they were all utterers, tellers forth, of some message of God. And whether that message took the form of remonstrance or encouragement, of promise or warning, of explanation of the past, reproof of the present, or revelation of the future, in all cases alike it was a constituent part of "the prophetic word:" it formed one portion, more or less prominent, of the whole of that inspired utterance, by which "God in time past spake unto the fathers by the prophets."

Now it is of this utterance as a whole—in other words, of the Volume of the Old Testament Scriptures—that St. Peter here says that it received confirmation, added certainty, from the words heard

by him and his brother Apostles on the holy mount of Transfiguration. These words—that emphatic testimony to the Divine mission and to the Divine person of the Son manifest in the flesh—set the seal of God once again, as before at the Baptism, to the fulfilment in Jesus Christ of every utterance, whether of type, prediction, or promise, contained in the prophetic word, in the oral and now written testimony of the messengers of God, "the goodly fellowship of the Prophets."

"Whereunto"—to which prophetic word, as recorded in Holy Scripture—"ye do well in giving heed;" it is right that ye should, as ye do, pay to it the most earnest and devout attention; "as unto a light," or rather "a lamp, shining in a dark (murky or squalid) place, until the day dawn and the day-star arise in your hearts."

Observe, the prophetic word is characterised by a different term from that which is applied in Scripture to Christ himself. It is a lamp; not the light of day, not the light of the sun, but the lamp which is its substitute during the hours of evening and of night. The same word is applied to John the Baptist in the fifth chapter of St. John's Gospel. "He was a burning and a shining light:"—"he

was the lamp which burns and shines" until the day dawn and the great light of Creation takes the place of the temporary and inferior substitute. So it is with the Prophets generally. What is true of the last and greatest of the prophets, the immediate forerunner and herald of Christ himself, is true of all. Ye do well in giving heed to their word, as to a lamp shining in a murky place till the day dawn.

But was then the Volume of the Old Testament closed and laid aside when Christ came in the flesh? when that true light arose, which lighteth every man coming into the world? Not so. It must still, St. Peter says, be honoured, and still studied. "Ye do well," he says, addressing men of faith and love, "in giving heed to it." The first coming of Christ did not close the work of the Old Testament Scriptures. Writing many years after that first coming, St. Peter commends those who attend to the prophetic word. He fixes a limit, but not a past limit, to the use of Holy Scripture.

(1) First of all, the day must dawn, and the day-star arise, in your hearts. Till Christ is found there, till his bright light is seen and felt within, till the heart rests and is satisfied in the revelation of

Christ himself in it and to it, so long, at all events, ye must give heed to the word which prophets and righteous men spake of old in preparation for his Advent. In this sense, the Advent spoken of is that of which the Lord himself said, "If any man love me, he will keep my word; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him and make our abode with him." Until that spiritual Advent is realized in us, there can be no intermission of the rule to "search the Scriptures."

How many of us, Christian friends, are ready, on this ground, to cease from the use of Scripture? In how many of our hearts has the day dawned and the day-star risen?

(2) But St. Peter hoped thus much of all whom he addresses. He hoped and he believed concerning all of them, that they had faith, and that their faith wrought by love. And yet he says to them, "Ye do well to give heed to the prophetic word, until," &c. In short, it is plain that he looks forward to a dawn not yet vouchsafed, to a rising not yet given. His thoughts run on to the great Advent of Christ in glory. His language is that of St. Paul in the 13th chapter of his Epistle to the Romans, "The night is far spent, the day is at

hand." The "night" is the time that is; the duration (as we speak) of this present world; the period, longer or shorter, as it may please God in his inscrutable wisdom to determine, during which the interests and the ambitions, the cares and the pleasures, the illusions and the sins, of this state of being, shall be suffered to run their course—as distinguished from that period, the arrival of which knoweth no man, when there shall be new heavens and a new earth; when pain and sorrow, sin and death, shall be for ever done away; when the glory of God shall lighten his city, and the Lamb shall be the light thereof. That is the "day," for which Christians look: at present they are in the night; though it be a night blessed with many lesser lights of divine revelation, which shine until the day dawn and the day-star rise finally upon their waiting hearts. In the meantime they do well to give heed to the prophetic word. And this for a reason which follows, but into which the time suffers us not now to enter; because "no prophecy of Scripture is of any private interpretation;" because "prophecy came not by man's will," but "holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost."

I would pause for a moment upon the expression "private interpretation."

I understand the "interpretation" or "solution" spoken of, to denote an explanation, not of, but by the prophecy.

Something is hidden in the darkness of the future, or in the obscurity of the invisible world. Hidden in God's deep counsels. Man cannot by guessing and cannot by searching find it out. It is an enigma, it is a riddle, of the divine. It is one of those dark impervious caverns which yawn on all sides around the little central light of revelation. God's servants would fain explore, but they cannot. They "enquire and search diligently," but it is in vain. At length God would solve this enigma, would tell this secret, would interpret this mystery. How? He interprets himself, so far as He sees fit, to one of his prophets. "Surely the Lord God will do nothing, but He revealeth his secret unto his servants the prophets." That is the "interpretation" spoken of by St. Peter. It is the interpretation, by prophecy, of some hitherto secret thing. And what he says of it is, that it is no "private," that is, individual, that is, merely human thing: it is not of the man himself to interpret God's mys-

teries: "Do not interpretations belong to God?" The interpretation, which *is* the prophecy, is the expression of another's mind, of another's purpose: it came not by man's will, but came as it was prompted by the Holy Ghost.

So strong and so general a testimony to the inspiration of Holy Scripture must ever be a comfort and help (not least in these times) to the doubting hearts of men.

We may easily lose ourselves in the by-paths which diverge on this side and that from the plain highway of truth. When, for example, we begin to define Inspiration, we are lost at once. The Bible lies unread while men quarrel over it: and when it is next opened, it is not as an oracle of truth, but as a thing soiled, spoiled, and desecrated by a treatment most opposite to its origin and to its end.

Let us suspend all these questions until we really know and really love the Bible; until by its help the day has dawned within, and the day-star arisen in our hearts. Let us resolve, every one of us, not to sit in judgment upon that word which is to judge us, but rather to let it speak for itself within, until we can gather from it, in the

way of inference at least, some clear instruction, as upon other topics, so also upon this—the nature and the extent of its own claim to our reverence as the Book of God.

And for the present, without entering into all the questions which are now sounding in our ears, as to the combination of the Divine element and the human in Revelation, or as to the *mode* in which God communicated with those whom He certainly has constituted (whether we will have it so or not) the chief instructors and the chief benefactors of the race of man—instead of this, let us listen to that great Apostle who here speaks to us, and says, Ye do well to give heed to Holy Scripture, for this reason; that it is not a private, individual, merely human, utterance, but its writers came from God to you, and spake as they were moved to speak by the Holy Ghost.

What St. Peter says of the Old Testament cannot be less true of the completed Volume; of that Book in which the Evangelists recorded the life and death of Jesus, and Apostles conveyed to Christian congregations the rule of faith and the rule of duty. I shall not spend one word in showing

that what is said of the Prophetic, is true, at least equally, of the Evangelical and of the Apostolical World.

1. First then, we have in the simplest form the duty of giving heed to Holy Scripture.

Doubtless we all imagine that we do so. In days of education it was our text-book: in our public services we hear it read weekly: on God's holy day most families have it open:—what lack we yet?

We will reflect upon some possibilities which would certainly prove us disobedient to St. Peter's summons.

In one of the Church Collects for Good Friday, we pray for certain classes and races of men, that God will "take from them all ignorance, hardness of heart, and contempt of his word." And we can all understand how open unbelievers, professed impugners, of the Christian Revelation are guilty of such contempt. But in our Litany, speaking in behalf of ourselves and of Christian people, we pray, in like manner, for deliverance from "hardness of heart, and contempt of God's word." Thus there is such a thing even among Christians as contemning or despising the Word of God.

This certainly must be the very opposite to giving heed thereto.

And what else is it but contempt, if we never take the pains to read, and to mark, and to learn, and to digest inwardly, God's Holy Word? if we count it, alone of all books, to need no patient study? if we think that we know beforehand all of it that we need to know, and never bend our knees in meditation over it, to that God who caused it to be written for our learning? It is the diligent students of the Bible, who are known amongst us as the humble and the devout and the wise and the understanding Christians. Them that honour it not, God doth not honour.

We cannot deny that there are peculiar difficulties in the way of this study. There is that impatience of familiar truth, which is in all of us by nature. There is an indisposition to the repeated reading of that which has been known from infancy, and which seems to offer nothing new as the reward of our research. There is a want of obviousness in the connection between reading and profit, even beyond that which hangs upon the use either of prayer, meditation, or communion. We all feel ourselves the worse for living one day

without *prayer:* everything is jar, irritation, and confusion; temptations have added strength, and duties a tenfold repulsiveness. But the evil consequences of neglecting the Bible are less tangible and more remote. It is not all at once that we become conscious of the dryness and barrenness and hunger of the soul in consequence of being denied its proper aliment, and left to subsist for weeks and years upon the putrid manna of a long-past and long-forgotten yesterday. We may go on thus for long without any sensible decay or any visible judgment. Thus for one person who lives without prayer, a hundred (it may be) or a thousand live practically without a Bible. They do *not* well in this matter of taking heed to the prophetic word.

Add to all this, the impediment felt and mourned over by many, of going back to the Bible from all manner of controversies as to its worth and its authority. Little do they know of the tenderness and precariousness of the life of faith within, who fling abroad here an argument and there a suspicion, here a jest and there a sarcasm, against that Holy Book which Christians in all time have agreed to look upon as the chief

storehouse of truth, and the chief repository of comfort. Great indeed ought to be the force of that conviction, and great the urgency of that compulsion, which shall constrain a man not only to surrender for himself, but also to destroy for another, that trust in the sure word of revelation, which has been to so many the one anchor of the soul amongst the winds, waves, and storms of this restless and troublesome world! A man whose faith in the Bible has been thus rudely, thus cruelly shaken, cannot, without some new resettlement and reinstatement, which comes not to many, obey St. Peter's charge, to take heed, in all quiet diligence, to the prophetic word.

And yet, "to whom else shall he go?" Who, save Christ only, even professes to have for us "words of eternal life?"

2. We notice, further, the peculiar character here assigned to the inspired word. It is a lamp, shining in a dark place, until the day dawn.

As many other things—the Church, the Sacraments, conversion, faith itself—so also the written Word has ere now been put in the place of Christ and of the Holy Spirit. The "lamp" has been made the "light." The candle has been idolized

as the sun. Language has been held about the Book, which ought to have been used only concerning Him to whom it points and guides.

A man may be well read, and well versed, and well skilled, in his Bible, and yet be no nearer the Way and the Truth and the Life, than he who has trusted in the punctuality of his church-going or in the frequency of his communions. The thing is possible, for it has been seen.

The proper description of the written Word is, a lamp shining in a dark place, *until*——until something happens; and then to be withdrawn, being replaced by the full blaze of a cloudless day.

"A dark place." Yes, such is this world of ours: so full of phantoms and shadows, of unrealities and illusions, of nightly dreams and waking visions; so empty of solid joys, of heart-deep comforts, of permanent satisfactions. And such too is this heart of ours; the reflection, in these respects, of the great world without; itself, like that, busy in the pursuit of happiness; yet evermore, when it brings that happiness in, and counts it over, finding it poor, and small, and partial, and evanescent.

Then the Word is like a lamp shining in this

dark place—shining in the world, shining in the heart—until something comes. How true, how striking, a picture! Yes, it is a lamp. It is not the sun, not the bright noon, not even (of itself) the real and sober dawn. It is a lamp. By its aid we pore over the map of life, and try to prepare ourselves for its long stages and comfortless haltings. By its aid we study ourselves: see, in example, what we are; see, in precept, what we ought to be; see, in warning, what we must shun; see, in promise, what we must desire. By its aid, more than all, we read, in description, the character of God, the work of Christ, and the office of the Holy Spirit.

But here the Book stops; and the greatest of all steps, from death unto life, may not yet have been taken. The lamp shines through its hours, and we are thankful: but to live by candlelight were but half a being. The lamp shines in our dark places, *until*——

Until the day dawn. Until the day-star rise in our hearts.

(1) Yes, until One who caused the page to be written, makes the page speak, and speak of Him. Until He who left us this guide through the hours

of darkness, says Himself once again, "Let there be light," and reveals Himself in our hearts by his Holy Spirit as "the Sun of righteousness risen with healing in his wings." It is the office of the Bible to tell of Christ, to point us to Christ, to show the way to Christ: not to supersede, not to be instead of Christ.

When the soul, informed by the Word, and at last quickened by the Spirit, has turned to the Lord; when, taught the way, it has also taken it, and come, penitent and earnest, to Him, to whom to come is at once eternal life; then the first office of the Bible is fulfilled: then in the individual soul the day has dawned and the day-star risen.

(2) But even then—then more than ever—the soul has recourse daily to that which has quickened once. Then again for daily growth, as before for one renewal, it gives heed to the prophetic, the evangelic, and the apostolic word. Still, though blind and dead no longer, its home is in a dark place; and it wants the lamp still, even though the inward dawn has begun. Still there is a watching and a waiting: for still it is night, on the whole, and not day; still the day-star shows not on the Church's horizon, nor is the dawn yet

visible on the everlasting hills which encircle her dwelling.

Thus then the lamp must shine on, and the faithful will give heed to it still. Shine on, till the second Advent; even through that spiritual, that individual Advent, spoken of at the outset, which links the second Advent with the first. When that great hope of the Church shall be finally realized; when He that shall come is come, and no longer tarries; then shall the lamp fade away of itself before the brightness of his presence, and He who has been read of by its light shall reveal himself face to face in glory.

But these things are as yet far above and beyond us, and humbler meditations are those which befit us in the present.

"Receive with meekness the engrafted word, which is able to save your souls." Receive it with meekness, study it with prayer, and it shall (under God) do this for you.

"All Scripture is given by inspiration of God; and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness." Use it thus; and at last, by its help, "the man of God shall be perfect."

In these things, soberly and thankfully received, let us find for the present satisfaction and repose.

In these things: and not less in those other modes of practical communication with a world unseen, by which Christ our Saviour has been pleased to lighten the darkness of time, and to cast, from the world of reality, a bright ray of hope upon the world of semblance and illusion.

But all this, in all its parts, through the operation of that Divine and Holy and Blessed Spirit, to whom, with the Father, and with his Son our Lord Jesus Christ, be ascribed all honour and glory, all might, majesty, and dominion, now, henceforth, and even for evermore. Amen.

III.

NUNC DIMITTIS.

"This Child is set for the fall and rising again of many in Israel."—Luke ii. 34.

HOLY SCRIPTURE is sparing in its revelations of the infancy and early life of Jesus.

Just the Birth itself—the visit of the Shepherds—the Circumcision on the eighth day—and the Presentation thirty-three days later in the Temple at Jerusalem—and St. Luke tells no more till Jesus is of the age of twelve years; and, after that one incident of boyhood, no more till He is a full-grown man, prepared to enter, through Baptism and Temptation, upon his ministry and sufferings for Israel and for the world.

To these few particulars — supplemented by

scarcely one or two more from St. Matthew's Gospel—our thoughts are confined, if we would keep within the limits marked out for us in Inspired Scripture in our meditations upon this deeply interesting portion of the Saviour's life below.

Let us read together the history of an Old Testament saint, who was privileged to see the Holy Child on the occasion of his Presentation in his Father's House below, and to bear to Him that first testimony—the very meeting and junction of the Law and the Gospel—which is repeated perpetually in our churches in the song of the "Nunc Dimittis."

We have three points to notice: The Character of Simeon; his Song; his Prophecy.

1. Of his character three things are said.

(1) He was "just and devout."

A "just" man is one who fulfils all relations. One who lives scrupulously and watchfully in the discharge of all those duties to which God calls him towards other men. In all things he is willing, and he is earnest, to live honestly, to live becomingly, and to live righteously.

A "devout" man is more than this. He is one who has God also in view. We scarcely believe in

a just man not being also devout. The righteousness of nature, even towards man, will be found to break down somewhere. There will probably be some duty ill done, half done, or not done, even towards man, if God be not in it. But Simeon was not just only: he was devout. He had a reverent mind. He remembered God. He asked in all things, What will God have me to do? And in order to this, he sought God. He prayed, and meditated, and studied God's Word, and visited his Temple for prayer and praise. And thus his exemplary life towards man was only the expression of an inner life of piety, faith, and love towards God himself.

He was just because he was devout.

(2) Again, he was "waiting for the consolation of Israel."

Israel wanted comfort. The condition of the nation was depressed. Under a foreign yoke—robbed of the visible token of God's distinguishing and protecting grace—it was ill with the people at that time collectively. Israel, as a nation, needed consolation.

And how must the individuals of the nation have felt this need of comfort! What a dry, barren

husk had the established religion of the country become! All life gone from it—a system of interpretation put upon God's law itself, trifling in its puerilities, disgusting in its hypocrisies! How must the souls of the faithful few have been crying out for something real—something substantial—something satisfactory — something true! The Scribe and the Pharisee had no consolation for Israel. The heart of the sorrowful, the heart of the self-accusing and self-condemned, must have yearned and thirsted for something better—something which might really speak of God and from God to the soul within!

But there was something yet more definite than this in the consolation for which Simeon waited. The "consolation" of the 25th verse is called in the 38th verse a "redemption." "Waiting for the consolation of Israel" is there described as "looking for redemption in Jerusalem."

There may have been a want of precision and definiteness in the expectation. We who look back upon the Law and the Prophets from the Gospel and from Christ, can see many things in them which would be mysterious and unintelligible to the Israelite of old time. But I think there was

this visible in them even then—that God's promise, Israel's hope, was a Person; that there should come upon earth a Deliverer and a Redeemer, to bring a light not of this world into men's hearts, and a holiness not of this world into men's lives; One who should suffer first, and then reign; One who should bear the iniquities of man, and then lift man himself into a region where sin is not. And this forms the second feature in the condition and character before us. The man "just and devout" was also waiting for a consolation, for a redemption, of Israel.

(3) The secret of his life, outward and inward, is next told us. "The Holy Ghost was upon him." He was under the influence of the Holy Spirit of God. Habitually: for, like the Psalmist of old, he doubtless knew of that Divine Spirit, and prayed for his converting and cleansing and renewing grace. But in another sense too. He received special communications from God, in the manner of the prophets that were before him. The habitual influence was an occasional influence too. The communication of Divine grace was also sometimes the revelation of Divine secrets. "It was revealed unto him by the Holy Ghost, that he should not

see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ." Thus the hope of the consolation of Israel became a personal hope too. Before he should die the common death of all men, he should see the Messiah himself coming to console and to redeem. What an august dignity was thus conferred upon that common human life! What a sanctity must it have possessed for him, when he knew that it was being prolonged for the sake and with the promise of that beatific vision for which prophets and righteous men had for countless generations died looking!

At last, on some common morning—on a day just like other days—there came the inward summons, the call of the Spirit, to go forth towards the Temple. Even then, perhaps, he knew not its meaning: but the call came, and it was obeyed. There, as he stood in the temple court waiting the Spirit's pleasure, there came in a woman with her infant child and her husband, poor in dress, and bringing towards the altar the offering of the poor; not the "lamb of the first year," but the "pair of turtle-doves or two young pigeons" prescribed in the Law of Moses as the alternative for her whose means were unequal to the regular sacrifice. Little

was there to mark any unusual occurrence: such scenes were daily witnessed in the temple precincts: the eye of sense would certainly have missed the sign: but, when a man has communed all his life long with God—has watched his hand attentively, and is even now looking for its presence—he sees by faith what flesh and blood see not; perceives the Divine presence not in the earthquake, the wind, or the fire, but rather in the still small voice in which He speaks inwardly by his Spirit. Even thus was it with him. In that little child he sees God's salvation; sees the promised seed of the woman; sees the Lord's Christ, the light of Israel and the hope of man. The Holy Ghost had witnessed in him of Christ; had brought him to Christ; and now opened his lips to sing of Christ in his temple.

2. And thus we pass from the character to the song. The old man takes the Babe in his arms, and pours forth his whole soul in thankful praise.

It has been well and beautifully said, upon this scene, "The death that glorifies God has a song on the lips, Christ in the arms, heaven in the eye." May such an end be ours!

The first two chapters of St. Luke's Gospel

furnish the Church with three of her daily hymns; the "Magnificat," the "Benedictus," and the "Nunc Dimittis." Notice how different are the three; how characteristic of the authors; how suitable to the circumstances: and draw from this a reflection as to the authenticity of the Gospel; a new evidence of the truth of that narration, of which St. Luke says that he derived it, by accurate and laborious search, from persons who "from the beginning were eyewitnesses and ministers of the Word."

When you say or sing henceforth the "Nunc Dimittis" let your thoughts go back sometimes to what you have read of its occasion and of its author. Read it as the utterance of one who had spent a long life in waiting for his consolation; who had been cheered by a special promise that he should not die till he had seen Christ; and who now, holding Christ himself in his arms, utters over Him that inspired thanksgiving which made Joseph and the Child's Mother marvel as they listened.

"Lord," he says, addressing himself to the Father in heaven—"Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace"—"now releasest Thou

Thy servant" — settest him free from his long earthly service—"according to Thy word;" that word which told me that I should not die till I had seen Christ: now therefore I have seen Him, and I may go.

Notice here Simeon's view of death. It is not the removal of a reluctant, unwilling man from the scene of all his joys and of all his interests: it is the releasing of a weary man at evening from the toil and heat of a long and fatiguing day; it is the desirable and peaceful dismissal of one who has done his work, to a rest which toil has earned and which promise has sweetened. "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace." It is just the language of one of our own Church Collects, in the Service for the Burial of the Christian Dead,—"with whom the souls of the faithful, after they are delivered from the burden of the flesh, are in joy and felicity." It is worth while, Christian brethren, so to live, that the "Nunc Dimittis" may express our own true thought when we die: "Lord, now lettest Thou Thy servant depart in peace, according to Thy word: for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation."

What Simeon saw was Christ himself. It was

the little Child in his arms to which he gives the name of God's salvation. We do well to reflect upon the wonderful faith which here shows itself. Simeon was enabled to look beyond all that was visible—beyond the helpless, unconscious Babe—beyond the long years that must run their course before these voiceless lips can utter one word of wisdom, or these little hands perform one work of power—beyond the yet more distant day when this mortal shall have put on immortality, and this Babe, which has not yet begun the career of human activity, shall have completed the round of toil and suffering, and resumed as the Redeemer that glory which as the Creator He had laid aside for man: "he was strong in faith, giving glory to God; and, being fully persuaded that what He has promised He is able also to perform," he calls the infant Christ the salvation of God, "prepared before the face of all peoples, a light to lighten the Gentiles, and the glory of his people Israel."

(1) First, then, to see Christ is to see salvation. To see Him, as Simeon saw Him, with the eye of faith. If Simeon had not seen Him thus, he would not have seen in Him God's salvation; for everything, to the outward eye, was against his being

so. "Every one," our Lord says, "which seeth the Son, and believeth in Him." We who have "not seen" may yet "believe." Is this, my friends, our idea of salvation—Christ himself? If it be, are we looking for Him? When we can see Christ by faith, then we shall be fit to die: then we can say, "Lord, now lettest Thou me go, and go in peace:" not before.

(2) And then, you will observe the amplitude of the view of Christ here presented. God, once more, "prepared" Him: pre-arranged, fore-ordained, and took steps beforehand for his coming; made ready the way before Him by his Law and by his prophets, by a gradual education of the world to desire Him and to find its need of Him; and at last brought Him into it "before the face," in the sight, "of all the peoples," of all the races and nations of mankind, so as to be as much "a light to lighten the Gentiles"—a light (more literally) unto unveiling of the Gentiles; that is, for the purpose of taking off from the Gentiles that "veil" of which Isaiah speaks as "spread over all nations," the veil of indifference and blindness and hardness of heart—as "the glory of God's own people Israel." Observe, I say, the amplitude of

this view of Christ. The eye of the faithful old man was opened to see beyond the confines of his own nation; to embrace in one glance all the kingdoms of the earth in all time and in all place; and to declare that to each and to all, yea, to each individual of all, Christ comes—comes to take off from them the veil of sin, and to fulfil at last the glorious prediction, "All flesh shall see the salvation of God."

3. We have yet to speak of the prophecy.

While Joseph and the Mother were still marvelling at the words spoken by the old man concerning Jesus, he turned to them, and with a solemn blessing first pronounced upon those who were privileged to hold so near a place on earth to the Saviour of mankind, spoke these words to his Mother only:—

"Behold, this [Child]"—or, in the original, "this Person"—"is set (or appointed) for the fall and rising of many in Israel." He is placed, or laid, as a firmly planted rock, with a twofold result and purpose: the fall of some, the rising of others.

Two passages of the Prophet Isaiah, the one from the 8th and the other from the 28th chapter, seem to be here brought together; as also in the

9th chapter of the Epistle to the Romans, and in the 2nd chapter of the First Epistle of St. Peter.

God places this child in Zion as a precious corner stone, a sure foundation.

Whosoever will may build upon Him the house of his habitation, and rise into a holy temple, safe from the storms of time and the devastations of judgment.

He is set for the rising of many.

But, if men will not thus use Him, as the foundation stone of a safe and sure dwelling; then (according to the other passage) they will find Him a stone of stumbling and a rock of offence: He will be like an obstructing rock in their path—even to them who stumble at the word, being disobedient.

God will not move Christ out of the way because men are perverse enough to stumble over Him.

This Child is set, by a hand not of man, to be either for the rising (if they will have it so), or else for the fall (if they will have it so), of many in Israel.

God gives the Saviour: blessed is he whosoever shall not be offended in Him.

A solemn responsibility! We must either rise by Christ, or fall—which we will!

"And for a sign spoken against."

A sign is a signal. In the Scripture use, it denotes something or some one pointing to God; to God's being, and to God's working.

Thus a miracle is a sign. It points to God. It says, God is at work: this hath God spoken, for this hath God done.

And thus Christ himself is a sign. He came upon earth to point to God. He came, to say by his words, and by his works, and by his character, and by his sufferings, "Behold your God!"

But this sign, like every other, may be, and commonly is, gainsaid, or spoken against. For one who accepts it—for one who, because of Christ, sees and believes in, and lives for God—many cavil; many reject, and many neglect the Gospel.

This in all times. But most of all, when He was himself amongst men. Then indeed gainsaying ran on into open violence; and the Son of man, despised and rejected of men, was at last given up into the hands of wicked men, to suffer death upon a cross of anguish and infamy.

Such is the warning, uttered, in the ears of his

Mother, over the little Infant lying still and helpless in the arms of the aged saint.

"Yea," he adds, "a sword shall pierce through thy own soul also." She who is now rejoicing in the blessedness of being her Lord's Mother, must learn that no one comes so near Christ, without partaking in his sufferings.

She will hear with sorrow the contradiction of sinners against Him: she will see Him outcast, destitute, spurned, forsaken: she will at last stand by his cross, and drink to the dregs with Him the cup of sorrow. The "sign spoken against" will bring anguish with Him to his Mother's spirit: her heart will be rent and lacerated as she sees Him pierced and tortured, as she beholds Him slowly pouring out his soul in a bitter and shameful death.

But all this shall be, all this must be, in order "that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed."

By their treatment of Christ himself, men will show what they are. The veil will be stripped off from them—such is the figure—by their own language and their own conduct towards Christ.

By their estimate of his character, by their appreciation or disparagement of his holy life, and

mighty works, and divine doctrine—by their acceptance or rejection of Him whose appeal was ever to the conscience of man, as in the sight of a heart-searching God—men will disclose their true disposition; will show whether they love the world, whether they echo its lying voice, whether they desire darkness lest their deeds should be reproved —or whether, on the other hand, they are brave to see, and bold to confess the truth, whether they have an ear to hear the voice of God, and a will to follow Him whithersoever He goeth.

But, most of all, as the end draws on, and the life of holiness is closing in the death of martyrdom. Then, even more than in earlier days, were the feelings of men tested, the thoughts of hearts revealed, by their dealing with the suffering and the crucified.

The high priests plot and blaspheme, Pilate vacillates and gives way, the soldiers part among them the garments, the people stand beholding, "Judas despairs, Peter repents, Joseph of Arimathea becomes courageous, Nicodemus comes by day, the centurion confesses, one thief blasphemes, the other prays, men faint and flee, women out of weakness are made strong," a sword pierces the

heart of the Mother, that the thoughts of many hearts may be revealed.

Even thus has it been in all time. For all time the words were uttered: it is by their treatment of Jesus, in himself and in his people, in his word, in his church, in his sacraments, in his Spirit, that men show decisively, before God, before one another, before themselves (if they will behold it), what manner of spirit they are of.

For us, Christian friends, not least, the prophecy of Simeon is recorded: let us try and judge ourselves by it, that we be not judged of the Lord.

To what purpose, in our case, is this Child set? to which of two purposes? for our fall, or for our rising?

(1) For our fall, if we let the word come to us unheeded, to be snatched away by the tempter, as we turn again, from reading or hearing it, into the world of business and pleasure.

For our fall, if we receive the word for the moment with joy, but take no heed to its watering by the Spirit's grace, to its growth by the sunshine of God's presence, by the dew of God's blessing.

For our fall, if we allow the word to become

choked in us by cares and riches and pleasures of this life, so that it brings no fruit to perfection.

For our fall, if we continue in sin that grace may abound—and, because we hear of a free forgiveness, and a world-wide atonement, care not how much we draw upon God's forbearance by a wilful waste of opportunity, and an obstinate disregard of duty.

This Child is set for the fall of many. And O, my friends, perhaps we have scarcely yet said of how many. It is not only the utterly hardened, not only the avowed unbeliever, not only the scoffer, the dishonest, or the impure, who stumble at the great stumbling-stone: it is quite as often the mere neglecter, the mere procrastinator, the merely undecided, the almost Christian, who shows what he is by his treatment of the Saviour and the great salvation. Not to be with Christ, is—He says it himself—to be (in his judgment) against Him.

(2) Let us listen—God grant it, at least in this our day of opportunity and of blessing—to the alternative here set before us.

This Child is set for the rising of many.

What is this "rising?" and in whom is it verified?

It is a rising out of darkness: out of the low misty valley of sense and worldliness, into the clear light and pure knowledge of Him whom truly to know is eternal life.

It is a rising out of misery: out of a condition of perpetual disquiet, of anxious misgiving, of constant disappointment, of restless fear, of every unsatisfied longing, into a state of rest and peace, of hope and happiness; entered upon the moment we believe in Christ crucified and glorified; confirmed and brightened by every additional day of watchful and holy living; to be perfected hereafter in a world of cloudless bliss, where they who have first been washed and justified and sanctified, shall dwell for ever and ever in the home of God and of the Lamb.

It is a rising out of sin: out of a state of low and degrading acquiescence in every evil lust and passion, or else of weary and hopeless struggling in a net which on every side baffles and encloses, into a state of freedom, life, and power, of grace to love God and liberty to serve Him, in the strength of an

indwelling Spirit, given to all who ask Him in the name and for the sake of Jesus.

"Set for the rising of many," the text says: who then are these?

They are those who feel their need of Christ. And which of us has not cause to do so? Which of us can be satisfied with his state without Christ? Which of us has no reason to blush for shame when he thinks of his past conduct towards God his Father, and to tremble in the prospect of standing before God his Judge? Yes, we need a Saviour, every one of us. But which of us all has really found a Saviour? Which of us all, who profess to believe and to worship Christ crucified and Christ risen, has truly sought Him for himself in the depth of his heart, as a lost, helpless sinner, whose one hope and one trust is in Him? We cannot assume, we cannot take for granted, even thus much of any human soul. This desire, and this faith, is itself the gift of God.

But we can all ask for it. And this is all that we will add to the great subject on which we have dwelt. If we feel that we ought to feel; if we feel that only our own coldness, and indifference, and hardness of heart prevents our coming to Christ;

if we feel that it is meet and right that sinners redeemed by the gift of a Divine Saviour should come to Him that they may have life; then let us pray to God himself, each one of us, for the grace and the power so to come to Him—acknowledging before Him our own helplessness either to will or to do, and beseeching Him to work in us that sense of sin and that desire for salvation, which whosoever hath, He will in no wise cast him out.

Reveal in us, Blessed Lord, the thoughts of our hearts; that, deeply feeling our own utter vileness, we may flee for refuge to the one hope set before us in Jesus Christ, who for us men and for our salvation came down from heaven, was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and in human flesh suffered and died, that He might be first the Lord of the living, and then the Life of the dead!

IV.

USES OF LIGHT.

"I am the Light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."—John viii. 12.

THE grandeur of the words must strike every one. The Son of God, standing in human form on the earth, standing in the courts of his Father's house among the worshippers at the Feast of Tabernacles, uses this sublime, this magnificent figure, to express that which He came to do for, and to be to, the universe of his moral creation. "I am the Light of the World." Once God said, when He created all things by Jesus Christ, "Let there be Light." It was the first act of that mighty drama, of which the curtain rose on Chaos, and fell on Paradise. "In the

beginning the earth was without form, and void . . . Darkness was upon the face of the deep. . . . And God said, Let there be Light: and there was Light. And God saw the light, that it was good: and God divided the light from the darkness. And God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. And the evening and the morning were the first day."

Now God speaks again—thousands of years lying between—and says once more, "Let there be Light:" and, this time, the Light is a Man: One like ourselves in all that makes the infirmities and the sorrows and the sufferings of mortal being; nay, "his visage is marred more than any man, and his form more than the sons of men:" and yet within that despised, that rejected Person, there "dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily:" and when He speaks at last, in answer to ten thousand taunts and cavillings and blasphemies, to tell men what He is and who; He, the meekest and gentlest of men—He, the patient sufferer, the unresisting, uncomplaining, unanswering, oppressed One—is heard to describe himself in terms most presumptuous, most blasphemous, if they be not true, even

in that character and that language which the text records, "Then spake Jesus unto them, saying, I am the Light of the World."

It is not altogether inconceivable that a proud, arrogant person—one whose manner was all pretension, and his words all presumption—might have run on at last, in utter self-ignorance, and self-delusion, into the notion that he was some great one; might have been gratified, like one of whom we read in Holy Scripture, when he heard men saying of him, "This man is the great power of God;" or, like another, "It is the voice of a God, and not of a man." In all ages men have vaunted themselves, and imposed upon others, to a degree not far short of even this fearful impiety. But we do feel that the combination of the admitted character of Jesus Christ with his equally recorded and admitted language concerning himself—on the one hand, his silence under rebuke, insult, and outrage, his constant readiness not to be ministered unto but to minister, to undergo all manner of slight and disparagement, and to spend and be spent for others—on the other hand, his repeated claims to be in a distinctive sense the Son of God, one

with the Father, the Sovereign Lord and King and Judge of men—is a combination at first sight so incongruous that no fiction would have risked it, and so marvellous that it can scarcely be accounted for but on the hypothesis of its truth.

I. "Jesus said, I am the light of the world."

What light is in its nature, has been in all times disputed. The question is still debated; and, even if it could be decided, this would not be the place for its discussion. It is enough for us to describe it in language altogether unphilosophical and popular, and say that light is that thing, be it what it may, which renders objects perceptible to our sense of sight.

A great man of this century (Dr. Chalmers) thus opens his well-known course of lectures on the Epistle to the Romans:—

"It is possible to conceive the face of our world overspread with a thick and midnight darkness, and without so much as a particle of light to alleviate it from any one quarter of the firmament around us. In this case it were of no avail to the people who live in it, that all of them were in possession of sound and perfect eyes. The organ of sight may be entire, and yet nothing

be seen, from the total absence of external light among the objects on every side of us. Or, in other words, to bring about the perception of that which is without, it is not enough that we have the power of vision among men; but, in addition to this, there must be a visibility in the trees, and the houses, and the mountains, and the living creatures, which are now in the ordinary discernment of men."

And then he goes on to "reverse the supposition." "We may conceive," he says, "an entire luminousness to be extended over the face of nature, while the faculty of sight was wanting among all the individuals of our species. In this case, the external light would be of as little avail towards our perception of any object at a distance from us, as the mere possession of the sense of seeing was in the former instance. Both must conspire to the effect of our being rendered conversant with the external world through the medium of the eye. The power of vision is not enough, without a visibility on the part of the things which are around us, by God saying, Let there be light: and as little is their visibility enough, without the power of vision stamped as

an endowment by the hand of God on the creatures whom He has formed."

So beautifully do the two worlds of matter and spirit correspond to and fit into each other, that, in this point as in others, we have cause to say, "All things are double, one against another; and God hath made nothing imperfect."

It is Christ who, like the light, renders the things of God visible: and it is the Holy Spirit who communicates to the eye of the soul that power of sight without which the other process would be unavailing. Jesus Christ says, "I am the light of the world:" and for the Ephesians St. Paul prays "that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of glory, may give to them the Spirit of wisdom and revelation in the knowledge of Him; the eyes of their understanding being enlightened, that they may know what is the hope of his calling." That which Christ renders visible, the Holy Spirit opens the eye to see.

"I am the Light of the World." We have heard what light is, in its great essential work of rendering objects visible. And in this leading feature we all see how Christ, Christ himself, can be compared to it.

It is presupposed that man is placed in the midst of a multitude of surrounding objects. The light does not create the landscape which it illuminates. The trees and the hills, the river and the meadows, were all existent before a particle of light streaked the sky above them. So it is in spiritual things. It would have been equally true that there is such a thing as spirit, such a Being as God, even though no one had come to make these realities known to us. Revelation is only an unveiling. It is the taking off of a covering from something which was there, and which was just as true and as real, before. There was the object, and there was the eye—there was the eternal verity of the Divine existence and the human relationship; and there was the reason and the conscience, the heart and the soul, qualified (so far as capacity went) to take cognizance of this verity—before the command, "Let there be light," rendered possible the necessary communication between the one and the other, between the already existing truth and the already existing faculty. Christ came to make the real visible: came, in other words, to be the Light.

(1) He had much to tell, even in the way of repetition and of enforcement. The religion of Nature, as we somewhat ungratefully call it, needed an authoritative republication, which it found only in Christ. Contemplate, either in Scripture or in heathen writings, the condition of the world of man as it was in the fullest refinement of Grecian or Roman civilization; and you will see that each particular of duty was completely blurred and obscured by the ever-deepening shadow of a godless life. Jesus Christ came to make morality itself visible to hearts and to lives which had lost its very outline.

(2) But how much more, when the matters of which He came to tell were matters lying outside the sphere of intellect or conscience; things which no one could know without having first lived in heaven; disclosures of God's requirements, of God's secret acts, of God's counsels, and of God's purposes, which only He who had been from eternity in the bosom of the Father could either speak or know! When the objects to be made visible were no longer man's duty to his brother, or even (in broad general lines) to his God; but those new obligations, springing out of new con-

ditions, which rest entirely upon the basis of Propitiation and Redemption, upon a Saviour's sacrifice and a Spirit's grace! These things too might have been, and man not know them. Christ the Light of the World was absolutely needed to make them visible.

We do not always appreciate as we ought this part of our Saviour's office. He is the Light, as well as the one chief Object which the Light has to make visible. He is not the Redeemer only, He is the Revealer too.

II. And now therefore let us use his own glorious similitude, as it lies here before us, and go on to ask what Light does for various classes and conditions of men.

(1) What is light to the traveller?

It may have happened to some of you to lose your way in the dark. You had often before traversed a particular field or trodden a certain pathway. In the daytime you needed not to investigate, you needed not to look around you: you could have passed from point to point, with eyes fixed on the ground, and a mind wholly pre-occupied. But on a certain evening, as you took your journey, the light failed you: you had gone

in the dusk, you must return in the dark: and now you find the difference between the two things: how great the distinction between a little light and none! You go round and round the hedge or the palisade; you look for the gate or the stile; you look, and you feel, and it is all darkness; night is upon you, and you begin to fear that you must spend its long hours shelterless. At last a feeble glimmering becomes perceptible in a distant quarter; a rushlight in a cottage window, a lantern in a farmyard shed, it is enough for hope in that perplexity; you make for it, and you are safe.

Such is light, when a man compares it by experience with darkness. So small a thing so much to him! And how much more, if the light were in such a case the light of day! kindling the whole region into brightness, and dissipating in a moment all the fear and all the distress of that wandering!

And we, my friends, are all, in this sense, travellers and wayfarers. It is not Christ who makes us so. We have all to make our way through the wilderness of this world to some destination—and what? We cannot answer the question. Sometimes life seems as if it led nowhither; as if it

were rather (what Scripture sometimes calls it) a "walk" than a journey; a little circuit, bringing us back at night to the home from which we started, rather than an extended progress, to terminate in an end most unlike its beginning. One day so like another; one experience of ourselves and others so little varied from a former; the events of life so small, its interests so trivial, its occupations so secular and so unheavenly; we go round and round the hedged and fenced paddock of our being, and see no way out of it on this side or on that. Christ comes to us then as the Light; shows us the path which we were missing, the outlet which we were ignoring; says to us, "This is the way, walk ye in it," when we should certainly have turned from it to the right hand or the left.

And most of all in those marked moments of life, which occur sometimes in the most monotonous and least eventful; days of bitter grief, when we feel ourselves bereaved and desolate in a world all cold and bare and dark; days of anxious suspense, when we feel that there is but a step for us between life and death, and we are powerless to take it; days of dreadful humiliation, when we find out our own weakness, our own vileness, our own

nothingness, and can do nothing to repair or to supply; then, above all, is the coming of Christ as the Light welcome and reassuring; when He can say, Lean upon me, and I will uphold thee: I have been before thee by this way: I will guide, I will support, I will bring thee home.

Such is light to the traveller.

(2) And what is light to the working man?

What work can be done without light? Hand-work and head-work are alike in this. Each requires light. Some kinds of work can be done only by daylight. An hour after sunset, out-door labour is impossible. Candlelight is a poor substitute at the best for daylight. But not this only. Candlelight alters colours, confuses details, obscures fine joinings and minute openings, and, for many eyes at least, is all but useless even for the work of the mechanic and the artisan. Perhaps you are on a journey: you wile away the time by reading: you are deep in some interesting story; you are within sight of the catastrophe: but daylight wanes and fades, and you are helpless and powerless at its mercy. Light of some kind, natural or artificial, is necessary for all labour; as much for that of the scholar and the writer, as for

that of the tradesman, the mechanic, or the husbandman.

Now every life has its work. If Christ had never come, still every life would have had its work. There is no such thing, since the Fall—nay, even before the Fall; for man in his original uprightness had his work set him, only the work was neither excessive in amount nor disappointing in result—there is no such thing as a life without duties; passive duties and active, receptive duties and reciprocal. Now is it not the simple truth, that life's work, in this higher sense, needs light for its performance? How difficult, how intricate, how perplexing, how unintelligible, would be the portion of each one of us in this world, with regard to man and with regard to God, without a Revelation! What a poor, inferior, inconclusive thing would toil be, if it had no motive of love and no recompence of reward! How absolutely impossible would it have been for a man to rise out of a low, grovelling, selfish spirit, in playing his part upon earth in the ambitions, competitions, and enterprises of the world, unless he could see his way through all into a purer region and into a better home beyond! We see how it is, even now,

even with a Revelation, in the case of men who live practically without God in the world. They are like men ploughing in the dark; like men designing, or painting, or matching colours, without even a lamp; like men reading or writing in a room fireless and candleless! Even such is the daily round of labour, for him who knows not whose he is and whom he serves; remembers not the hand that made him, and despises the Word which is to be his judge. Christ may come into the world, and come as the Light of the world; and yet not be received, and not be used, and not be worked by, as such. And then we see what it would have been for *all* if He had never come: yes, even more gloomy and disconsolate still; because even these men who will not use his light are indebted to it; indebted to it more than they think, for explanations unconsciously accepted, and for hopes unwittingly entertained.

Christ is then, secondly, what light is to the working man. He comes to give a motive for work, and a power for work, and a principle of work; to give an explanation of work in its doing, and to give a hope for work in its end. Strike Christ out again from his world, and dreary indeed

and comfortless would be the working life of each one of us.

(3) Once again, think what light is to the watcher. We have spoken of the walker, and of the worker: now think of the watcher.

The Psalmist speaks of those who "watch for the morning." What an experience of human sorrow does he there touch upon!

Few persons can have lived to middle age, without having known what night may be, in the way of gloom and of suspense.

Some of you have spent its long hours in a sick-room. Never can you forget that protracted watching over the suffering form of some dying friend. It seemed as though the night-watches were interminable. Each hour told its coming and its going upon the church clock in your street; and the moments sounded in your ear, from the watch or the timepiece, with a distinctness and an emphasis which became almost insufferable. "Would God it were morning!" was the cry of your heart, even though the morning might more than probably rise not upon a bed of sickness, but upon the bed of death. "Give light, and let us die," was the voice of nature within: anything rather than this thick

darkness, in which every shadow is a form, and every fancy a substance.

And the same thing has been the experience of some, under strong conviction of sin. A particular act of the past day, some deed of unkindness or of uncleanness, done against conscience, against resolution, in spite of prayer, in defiance of God, hangs about your pillow and forbids repose. Or else thoughts, not so distinctly born of a remorseful conscience, but more generally suggestive of the reality of a God too long disregarded, and of the coming of a judgment too evidently unprepared for, have been present with you through the interval of calm and silence, and have agitated you with fears which you trust daylight may scatter, or impressed you with resolutions which you want daylight to realize. You too have known what darkness is to the watcher.

Sometimes the experience takes a stranger form, and presents itself in scenes painfully exciting.

A thrilling story is told, in a late record of Indian life,* which seems to carry with it an authentication not to be gainsaid.

* "My Indian Journal," by Colonel Campbell, pages 142, 143; from which the following paragraph is copied almost *verbatim*.

A native hunter passed a whole night within a few paces of a wounded tiger. The man's bare knees were pressed upon the hard gravel, but he dared not shift, even by a hair's breadth, his uneasy posture. A bush was between him and the wild beast: ever and anon the tiger, as he lay with glaring eyes fixed upon it, uttered his hoarse growl of anger; his hot breath absolutely blew upon the cheek of the wretched man, and still he moved not. The pain of that cramped position increased every moment—suspense became almost intolerable; but the motion of a limb, the rustling of a leaf, would have been death. He heard the gong of the village strike each hour of that fearful night, that seemed to him an "eternity, and yet he lived." The tormenting mosquitoes swarmed around his face, but he dared not brush them off. That fiendlike eye met his whenever he ventured a glance towards the horrid spell that bound him; and a hoarse growl grated on the stillness of the night, as a passing breeze stirred the leaves that sheltered him. Hours rolled on, and his powers of endurance were wellnigh exhausted; when, at length, the welcome streaks of light shot up from the eastern horizon. On the approach of day the tiger rose, and stalked

away with a sulky pace to a thicket at some distance—and the stiff and wearied watcher felt that he was safe.

How true to the Psalmist's saying, "Thou makest darkness, that it may be night; wherein all the beasts of the forest do move: the sun ariseth, and they get them away together, and lay them down in their dens!"

Such is darkness, and such is light, to the watcher.

And need I say how in *this* case Christ proves himself the Light of the World? In anxiety, in sorrow, in danger, in distress for sin—is it not in these things, above others, that He shows himself strong to save? Christian biographies, Christian experiences, are full of the proofs. How often has He made the wife or the mother willing to part with the joy of her heart, with the desire of her eyes, because He, her Lord and Saviour, demanded the sacrifice, and in demanding transformed it! How often has He cheered the self-tormenting misery of the conscious transgressor, by bringing to his mind the all-sufficiency of His own sacrifice, and saying to the inward ear, "The blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin!" How

often has He interposed, in the hour of need, for the deliverance of a beleaguered and sorely tempted soul; blunting the weapons of the "strong man armed," giving that shield of faith which quenches the fiery darts of the wicked one, and making the Christian more than conqueror through Him that loved him!

III. "I am the Light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."

1. "He that followeth me." He that walks after me. He that treads in my steps: at once my disciple, my servant, my imitator, and my friend.

Do the words discourage any man? Is any one saying in his heart, "Yes, his follower: but I am not such: I am all weakness, all inconsistency, all unbelief?" It is well to feel this: much as we know against ourselves, there is more yet which we know not: "God is greater than our heart, and knoweth all things." Yet let us not pervert this self-misgiving, just and right as it is, into a reason for despondency: to "follow" is not to overtake, is not to keep up with Him: he who lags ever so much behind, he who faints ever so often in the

long toilsome ascent, shall yet be called Christ's follower, if only he still keep in the way, still endeavour, and still draw not quite back!

2. "He that followeth me shall not walk in darkness."

(1) Shall not walk in the darkness of ignorance. Shall not be left entirely untaught, altogether undisciplined, in that education which is for eternity and for heaven. Shall not be left to walk in the sparks of his own kindling; to find the way for himself, or to be his own teacher in the things of the soul and of God. I will be his Teacher: I will be his Light in knowledge.

(2) And he shall not walk in the darkness of misery. "If one look unto the land, behold, darkness and sorrow; and the light is darkened in the heavens thereof." In Scripture "darkness" is sorrow, and "light" is joy. "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." He shall not walk in misery. He may have his dark days; his days of returning despondency, and of overshadowed hope: but, on the whole, he shall be a gainer, in point of happiness, by having sought and endeavoured to follow Christ: he shall be a happier man, even now

than he was when he cared not how he walked nor whither he went.

(3) And he shall not walk in the darkness of sin. Yes, this is the especial sense in Scripture of light and darkness. "Works of darkness" are sins: "children of light" are holy persons. Christ will enable a man who follows Him to walk no longer in sin. He does not promise him all at once a freedom from sin: still less does He promise him in this life an exemption from temptation. But He does promise that, if a man will follow Him —follow Him as he can—it may be lagging, loitering, even fainting and falling after Him—yet still following; following Him as his Master, following Him as his Teacher, following Him as his Saviour —he shall not walk in the darkness of sin: he shall find in himself, by virtue of that following, a little strength and a little holiness: he shall find that the Holy Spirit, earnestly sought and anxiously cherished, does work in his heart a work of good, if it be not all, nor of the kind, that he expected: he does find, when he looks back upon the past year, or the past five years, of his earthly pilgrimage, that he has made a little way: Christ is "putting out his enemies before him little by

little:" the path of the Christian, like that of the just, is, on the whole, "as the shining light, which shineth more and more unto the perfect day."

3. "But shall have the light of life." Yes, it is written, "In Him was life; and the life was the light of men."

What is "life," when we speak of the soul? The life of the body was the breath of God. "The Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life: and man became a living soul." That was the life of this world; the life which goes out of a man when he dies. But the life of which our Lord here speaks is a life which never goes out. It is that life which consists in communication with God; in the effluence of God into man's soul; in union with God through Christ by the Holy Ghost. "This is life eternal, that they might know Thee, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom Thou hast sent." How "know Thee?" As a man reads in a book? or as a man learns a language, or studies a science? Nay, but as a man knows a friend; knows him by discourse, knows him by intercourse, knows *him* (above all) by love. "If any man love God, *the* same (knoweth, or rather) is known of Him."

"The light of life" is that kind of insight into the things of God which consists in acquaintance, personal, vital acquaintance, with God himself, as alone He can be known, in Jesus Christ—as alone He can be known, by the Holy Spirit.

This then is the condition, and this the promise: the promise in its two parts, the negative first, and then the positive.

The condition. Follow Christ. Take Him for your Teacher. Determine to have none other determine, God helping you, not to cease from your effort until you have come up with Him heard Him speak, and speak to you. Struggle after Him in humility; struggle after Him in faith struggle after Him by prayer and by watchful living: and you too shall be his disciple.

And what then? Then, He says this to you You shall not walk in darkness. You shall not be left in the gloom of ignorance, or in the gloom of unhappiness, or in the gloom of sin.

Nay, He says, you shall even "have light. What is light? It is "life." It is Christ himself He is the Light: you shall have Him: and having Him, you shall find that your soul lives because of Him; that in secret, and by a course which you

trace not, something is given to your soul that makes it live; live as it never lived before; live a new, a higher, a Divine life; live a life inside and above this life; a life independent of chance and change, independent of kindness or unkindness, of love or coldness, from those around you, independent of time and sense, of circumstances and possessions; because hidden in God, where Christ himself is, at the right hand of God. "And when Christ, who is our Life, shall appear, then shall ye also appear with Him in glory!"

"I am the Light of the World: and he that followeth me shall have the light of life."

How great an encouragement! How strong a motive for seeking! The beginnings of this "following" are a few weak prayers, a few feeble efforts, a few resolute communings with Him who is the Life: the end of this following is a full blaze of glory, a perfection of knowledge, a satisfaction of love, "pleasures for evermore." Who shall not essay the one, that he may at last know the other?

V.

A MAN OF SORROWS.

"A man of sorrows."—Isaiah liii. 3.

HIS was one of the marks by which Israel was to know his Christ.

On the whole, no mark was so distinctly foretold.

Visions, indeed, of triumph and empire floated here and there before the prophet's soul: visions of a conquering Chief and a sovereign people.

But one thing was plain: that in some marvellous way "He that should come" would combine humility with exaltation, suffering with majesty, shame with glory, and death with life.

The jealous preservation of this chapter by the Jews themselves among the writings of Divine Inspiration, is one of the most extraordinary proofs

of the special Providence of God in giving and preserving to our use the sacred deposit of his revealed truth. Every line of it condemns them: and yet they have been made to keep it for us. "Unto them were entrusted," for everlasting preservation, "the oracles of God."

The promised Saviour was to be

A MAN OF SORROWS.

That was to be his characteristic. Though mingling freely in the homes and amidst the enjoyments of others, He was not to give the impression of a joyous person. Humanly speaking — yea, more than humanly speaking — his strength was to lie elsewhere. The power by which He was to draw men to himself, the charm by which He was to keep men near himself, was not to be the charm of cheerfulness, not the pleasantness of his speech or the gladness of his character: it was to be just the opposite of this: it was to be his acquaintance with grief: it was to be his insight into and sympathy with the sufferings of his creatures: those who were to see any beauty in Him that they should desire Him—and the prophet hints that while He was upon earth they

would not be many—must see that beauty in this: that He was "a Man of Sorrows."

How this was fulfilled in our Lord Jesus Christ, I need not remind you. But it is good for us to dwell upon it, though we know it.

I. His own personal life was a sorrowful one.

He was away from home; from his Father's presence.

He was a stranger—and made continually to feel it—in a strange land.

From his childhood He was full of thoughts which He could not utter; because, if uttered, they were not understood.

He was a lonely man. Those who loved Him knew Him not. They were constantly misreading his intentions, thwarting his purposes, and suggesting a line of action which was not his own.

While they were faithful to Him, they could not understand Him. It was a constant struggle for Him to convey spiritual thoughts to the carnal, and heavenly ideas to the earthly-minded.

At last they deserted Him: all forsook Him and fled.

Joyless his life was at all times; unquiet, laborious, homeless: He "had not where to lay his

head:" "there were many coming and going, and He had no leisure so much as to eat." Prayer, his one solace, was often interrupted by new demands: and, when He was at work, his own friends said that He was beside himself.

His sympathy with others by no means implied their sympathy with Him. In general, the sympathy was all on one side. He had cause indeed to say—well was it for Him that He could say it—"It is more blessed to give than to receive!"

II. But his sorrows, like his labours, were for others. It is in this aspect chiefly that we would now regard Him as the Man of Sorrows.

1. Jesus Christ sorrowed over bodily suffering.

No doubt, his miracles were wrought in attestation of his Messiahship. But how did they attest his Messiahship? Would they have done so if they had been wrought in cold, sullen, scornful indifference? as by One who was performing a necessary task, and that for his own sake; to bear witness to himself? What made the miracles a sign of the Messiahship, was the whole thing together: the power, doubtless, in part; but not less, the tenderness, and the gentleness, and the

sympathy, and the love, which prompted in each case the beneficent act.

It was a great thing that He fed the five thousand in the wilderness with a few loaves and a few small fishes. But was it not almost a greater thing, that He who had the power to do this should have felt that yearning compassion, of which the Evangelists tell, in the sight of that hungry, homeless, needy crowd? "Jesus, when He came out, saw much people, and," because He was the Man of Sorrows, and not a being of some mould different from that of suffering humanity, therefore He "was moved with compassion toward them," and in that warm, kind, generous pity first taught and then fed them.

How beautiful, in this connection, becomes the miracle, recorded by St. Mark only, of the healing of the deaf and stammering man by the sea of Galilee; when He, who had the power, and knew that He had the power, to remove the malady, yet, in the very act of doing so, "looked up to heaven and sighed" as He said the all-powerful "Ephphatha" which bade the deaf ear be opened! That sigh fulfilled the sign given in prophecy of Him that should come. It showed Him, not only

as the Almighty One, in whom dwelt all the fulness of the Godhead bodily; but also as that All-pitying One, in whom dwelt all the fulness of humanity too; as the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief.

2. He sorrowed too over mental suffering.

When He met that funeral procession coming forth from the gate of Nain, with the widowed and now orphaned mother following behind, it was not that He hailed this as an opportunity of "manifesting forth his glory;" it was not that He coldly or roughly restored the breath to the closed lips, or the warmth to the frozen limbs, or the colour to the pallid cheek and brow of death, as One who would say, "Receive the credentials of my Messiahship, and accept me by this sign as your Lord and King: no, a human compassion wrought with the Divine power, and marked the Redeemer not only as the mighty God, but also as the Man of Sorrows, bearing our griefs. "When the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her:" and when He had bidden the young man to arise, it was "to his mother" that He "delivered him."

Even so it was in the more detailed narrative of the raising of Lazarus. Although He thought it

needful for God's glory that the death should not be prevented but suffered, and allowed therefore the sisters to think for two days that He was wanting in his care for them, yet how tender was the feeling shown at each step of that wonderful history; from the first mention of the "sleep" of his friend to his disciples at a distance, to the grief shown in the meeting and the tears shed at the grave! That briefest of all sentences, "Jesus wept," how does it carry with it, to all mourners, the assurance of his tender concern for them, who is himself the Man of Sorrows, acquainted with grief!

3. He sorrowed too over spiritual suffering.

Wherever He saw anxiety and distress for sin, there, more than elsewhere, was his sympathy shown.

The publican standing afar off, in shame and penitence, in the temple courts; able only to smite upon his breast, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner;" whether his case was one actually seen, or only given by the All-wise Teacher as the sample and specimen of many; with what strong respect and deep sympathy does He speak of him! "I tell you, this man went down to his house

justified rather than the other." As though He would say, I know the thousand times ten thousand hearts in which that Parable will in all ages be fulfilled: I know, and I feel for, and I love them; and here I place on record for all time the assurance of my tenderness and of my sympathy towards the self-accusing and the sin-laden.

And then the "woman which was a sinner;" who came to Him, unbidden and unwelcome and despised of others, as He sat at meat in the Pharisee's house; stood at his feet behind Him weeping, washing his feet with her tears, and anointing them with precious ointment; till at last He uttered those life-giving words, "Her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much:" and again, "Thy faith hath saved thee; go in peace."

It was but one example, out of many, of the sympathy of Christ with spiritual suffering. How was it with the fallen disciple, with St. Peter, in his sin and in his repentance? Wonderful is the record of that "look" which his Master, then on his trial—wearied, insulted, and outraged himself, and not least by his own—found time and heart to bestow upon him, as though at once to bring him

to himself, and also to assure him that he was not forgotten! Marvellous, too, the tenderness of that thrice-repeated question, after his resurrection, "Simon, son of Jonas, lovest thou me?" as if He would give him the desired opportunity of a threefold recantation of his threefold denial; and then of that solemn and touching re-investiture with the apostolical office, in the charge thrice repeated, "Feed my lambs"—"feed my sheep"—"feed my sheep." Surely there is no one who may not bring to Christ, with all humility, yet with all confidence too, the confession of his sins and shortcomings, his unfaithfulnesses and backslidings!

III. And yet we have scarcely touched upon the keenest of Christ's sorrows.

That sorrow which consists in sympathy with sorrow, carries its balm with it. Two hearts feeling together—and that is sympathy—half console each other. Sympathy is sweet, however bitter the grief which it shares. That person does not know the worst of all sorrow, who knows only a fellow-sorrow; a grief which he is helping to bear, or a grief which another bears with him. If Christ had had no sorrows but those of sympathy with a malady which He could heal, with a bereavement

which He could repair, or with a penitence which He could bless with his forgiveness, the words of the text had not been verified in Him to the full.

He was a Man of Sorrows also, and chiefly, in relation to sin.

1. He had to *see* sin.

All around Him there was sin.

(1) Many vices were doubtless practised there, in the Holy Land; making homes wretched, and doing dishonour to God. The common sins of a fallen nature were daily committed, no doubt, if not in his sight, yet at least in the full view of his Omniscient intuition. These things caused Him sorrow.

(2) It was perhaps worse still to see religion itself with its very heart eaten out of it in those who professed to be its disciples and even its teachers. It is quite plain that the formalism, the false sanctimoniousness, the utter and absolute hypocrisy, of the Scribes and Pharisees, was the thing which caused our Saviour on earth the greatest concern as well as the greatest displeasure. It met Him everywhere. He could not go into the Temple, without seeing some sign of it.

Perhaps there was a Pharisee saying his prayers; for a pretence making long prayers, full of boasting and self-parade; and then going away to devour a widow's substance. Perhaps there was a Scribe teaching the people; laying down the law, professing (unhappily) to lay down *God's* law, to the ignorant but respectful knot of men, women, and children around him: and in all that he taught them there was not one word of truth, not one word of reality, not one idea communicated by which the soul could be nourished. Perhaps, when Christ was teaching, or when He was in the very act of healing, He saw before Him—it happened constantly—some suspicious countenance, some "evil eye," watching his work and lying in wait to accuse. Often the same spirit broke out in open blasphemy. "This Man is in concert with the devil. The devil lets Him cast him out, that he may be the gainer." The finished work of such men was his betrayal and murder: but the work, in its beginning and in its progress, was harder still for Him to bear; thwarting his gracious designs, and giving at each turn that most painful impression, of being in a hostile presence and watched by a hostile eye.

(3) Sin came nearer to Him even than this. The very lists of the Apostles bear witness to it. "And Judas Iscariot, which also was the traitor." Most wonderful indeed is the record of that Divine forbearance, which treated the traitor Apostle, through three long years, on terms of friendship, confidence, and sympathy. All the miracles were wrought, all the discourses of Christ were uttered, with Judas Iscariot standing in the inner circle. And "Jesus knew from the beginning who should betray Him." Can we think of a trial, of a sorrow, heavier than this? to have in your own household, at your own table, admitted to your confidence, possessed of your secrets, one who is hardening more and more into hostility, and whom you know to be marked out as your eventual betrayer? This sorrow was Christ's all along. He had a traitor in his camp, an enemy in his bosom.

2. But all this stops short of making Christ the Man of Sorrows.

He had also to *bear* sin.

To see sin was sorrow to the Holy One. To see sin ruining men's lives, teaching in God's name, present daily with Him in disguise, was enough to sadden Him. But He was to come closer

even than this to it. "He bare," this chapter says, "the sin of many."

We do not desire to speak, where God has not spoken, on a subject the most difficult and the most mysterious of all. But when the Word of God says—and it is only one passage out of many —"God made Him, who knew no sin, sin for us," we see that there must be something intended, of a taking upon Him of human sin, which goes far beyond the mere seeing and hearing, the mere feeling and grieving for, that which is evil; something best expressed, to our imperfect comprehension, by the words offering and sacrifice, atonement and propitiation; insomuch that the sins of each one of us were laid upon Christ to be borne and done away; the justice of God made consistent with his mercy in forgiving and blotting out transgression; and all for the sake of the merits and death of his Son Jesus Christ, who is the one immaculate Lamb given to take away the sin of the world.

It is probably in reference to this, above all else, that Christ is here called a Man of Sorrows. If we wish to see Him in his sorrow, we must go with Him to Gethsemane and Calvary. It was in Geth-

semane that the confession fell from Him, "My soul is exceeding sorrowful even unto death." It was on Calvary that the cry was wrung from his lips, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" Surely it was neither the fear of death nor the presence of death which constituted the point and sting of that grief. It was no mere remembrance of what He had seen of sin upon earth, no mere anticipation of what sin might yet be in its misery and in its consequences, which expressed itself in those bitter words of anguish. Sin was nearer to Him even than the memory or the foreknowledge. It was then lying upon Him: He was bearing it—bearing it for us—tasting death, not for himself, but (by the grace of God) for every man. The crowning point of the sorrows was the conscious incorporation with the sin. He had grieved over it in the spectacle of hardened hearts and seared consciences: He had wept over it in the contemplation of a doomed city, and in the prospect of a ruined and desolate country: now He bore it upon his soul, and, in pouring out that soul unto death, knew and felt that He was not only numbered with the transgressors, but making his soul (as it is written) an offering for sin. The

Man of Sorrows is perfected, in that character, as the sin-bearer and the sin-offering.

IV. The subject is full of interest, and full of instruction.

1. If it is as a Man of Sorrows that Jesus Christ comes to us, it must be, first of all, as a memento of the fitness of sorrow to our condition as sinful men.

The great desire and yearning of our nature is for happiness. It is so, and it must be. A man who does not wish to be happy is a man with a deformed and distorted mind. By nature we all desire it; and God implanted that desire in us for our good.

The fault is not in the desire for happiness; but in our mistakes as to its nature. Many of us mistake carelessness for happiness. This is, in other words, to mistake security for safety, forgetfulness of danger for freedom from danger.

If there is one word of truth in the Bible, we are all in great danger; danger of utter ruin and of final misery. If this be true, it can be no happiness to forget it. We all pity a person whom we see rushing on unawares to a desperate collision or a frightful fall. His ignorance of the danger is what

we most commiserate. We do not say, He has been spared a few moments of fear: we rather say, If he had only foreseen he might have prevented the crash. Is it not so with the soul? If each one of us is in danger it is wretched that we should be triflers. If not the danger only, but also a way of escape is made known to us, then seriousness is the first condition of happiness, and carelessness is not only unbecoming, it is fatal too.

Now I say that the thought of our Saviour as a Man of Sorrows should show us the suitableness of seriousness, and even of sadness, to our condition as fallen and sinful beings.

A Christian ought to be happy: but who that is capable of judging will deny this, that one ingredient in true happiness is sorrow? Sorrow for the sufferings of others—sorrow for the sins of others—sorrow for our own sins, first and most of all—is that a bar to peace? In the happiest persons whom we have known there has been a vein of sadness: they were happier in proportion as they had this: for it made their happiness truer, it made it safer, and it made it more Christ-like. A person who is all smiles and jests is not a happy man: because his whole happiness rests upon a lie: he is trying

to represent the world to himself as what it is not, as what a fallen and sinful world cannot be: and he is trying to represent his own state to himself as what it is not; for he who is fighting his way through snares and temptations, through infirmities and sins, into a life in which God is all, has other things to do than to picture scenes of flowers and sunshine, of relaxation and repose.

For all men seriousness, for most men sadness, is the expression of the truth. All are in danger: most men are not even in the way out of it.

With a Man of Sorrows for our Saviour, we are reminded of this first truth.

2. Again, only a Man of Sorrows could be a Saviour for all men, and for the whole of life.

We dare not say in what proportion—but certainly in a very large proportion—sorrow is mixed up in the experience of human life.

For one man entirely at ease, in mind, body, and estate, how many, shall we say, are in a condition of discomfort, of conscious disquietude, in one of these respects or in all? Of the readers of these pages, who is there without some definite drawback to entire satisfaction? The health, or the income—the business, or the family—the affections,

or the conscience—the past, or the future—I do not suppose there are ten persons amongst them all who could honestly say that in all these things they are entirely and absolutely happy. Now just in proportion as there is a drawback to happiness, there is what we may call a natural affinity and attraction to Christ. Slow as we are to turn to Him in affliction, we are slower still to turn to Him in prosperity. "They that are whole need not a physician, but they that are sick." Not until the lights of earth are dimmed, do men commonly look out for the great, central, all-quickening light of heaven. "When He slew them, they sought Him." And then the thing which most touches them is the thought that the Saviour was a suffering Man below; that He tasted not of human joy, but drank to the dregs the cup of human grief; that He was despised and rejected of men, bore our griefs and carried our sorrows, was wounded for our transgressions and bruised for our iniquities, was himself (in every sense) a Man of Sorrows, and profoundly acquainted with grief. It is this which makes Him a Saviour for all men and for the whole of life: for the sad as well as the joyful, for hours of gloom as well as moments of gladness.

3. It seems to follow from these things—and it is always worth dwelling upon—that sorrow, however deep, has its solaces and its compensations.

(1) Whatever it be, it is of the nature of sorrow to bring a man nearer to truth, nearer to reality, nearer therefore to hope. A man in sorrow is all the nearer to the Man of Sorrows. I know too well that he may be in sorrow and yet miss Him. Sorrow of itself brings no man to Christ. There is a "sorrow of the world," St. Paul says, which "worketh death," as well as a "godly sorrow," which "worketh repentance unto salvation." Still, in itself, sorrow is a favourable condition for the soul's health. A man who turns not to Christ in sorrow, would still less turn to Christ in gladness. He is the nearer to Christ for it, though he may not —if he will not—reach Christ through it. One great and chief obstacle is removed: it is his to arise and go to Him.

(2) And sorrow makes a man more useful. It gives him a new experience and a new sympathy. Like his Master, he can now go with acceptance to the suffering. He finds in himself a new power of entering into their sorrows; and if he be a Christian

indeed, he is able to "comfort them which are in any trouble by the comfort wherewith he himself has first been comforted of God." This, in the Christian estimate, is no light matter. He can now do Christ's own work—as he could not before —of ministering to the distressed and sorrow-laden. They will trust him now. They will find in him a response which they seek in vain, or probably seek not, in the prosperous. Let him draw out of the wells of salvation a supply both for himself and them!

4. One thing remains; the most important of all: the question, namely, how we stand, we ourselves, in reference to this Saviour.

If He is a Man of Sorrows, it is in order that He may minister to our sorrows. It is that He may draw us to Him by the assurance of his sympathy, and keep us near Him by the experience of his tenderness.

(1) There are some few persons amongst us, who could not truly describe themselves as being in sorrow. Life has dealt gently with them thus far; the rough hand of pain and loss has not yet been laid upon them: they imagine that it will be so with them, or not far otherwise, even to the end.

In the meantime they let well alone, and take that which comes.

And is this all? Is there to be no provision made against change, against misfortune, against sorrow, against death?

To you Christ speaks as the Man of Sorrows, just because you want the contrast between what He is and what you are; want it for sobering, want it for awakening, want it for admonition and instruction in righteousness. He would say to you, There are realities which you scarcely dream of, around, above, and before you: if you think not of them, you are lost: come unto me, and I will teach you: I will open the closed eye, and give understanding to the sealed heart: I will make happiness safe for you, make it true, and make it eternal. There cannot be happiness where there is not truth: I will set your feet on the rock, and then you shall never be moved.

(2) Others are at this time in great sorrow: lonely, desolate, friendless, disconsolate. And yet even they do not quite see how and where they are to find Christ. They have a general trust in his mercy, in his tenderness, in his sympathy: but if they are to say that they find rest in Him, find

comfort, find love, they cannot. The world is dark to them, and yet heaven is not bright. My friends, He is nearer to you than you think. You must not expect, still less wait for, visible or audible tokens of his presence. He is everywhere, and therefore here: "He that made the eye, does He not see? He that made the ear, shall He not hear?" Yes, He sees your want, in its hidden source and spring: He sees, and He regards it. The heart's desire is the prayer He looks for: deal with Him as if He heard, as if He cared for you; and be assured that it is so. "We shall know," says the Prophet, "if only we will follow on to know the Lord."

(3) The chief trouble of others is about their sins. They are disheartened, they are discouraged, they are half in despair. This sin which has long beset them, this sin which they have prayed against, which they once thought they had half vanquished, is again upon them: again they are entangled, again overcome. Who shall deliver them from the body of this death?

You have seen, my friends, once again now, what Christ is towards sin; how He came, and lived, and suffered, and died, a Man of Sorrows,

chiefly because of it: it caused Him his chief anguish: it cost Him his life; twice over; a dying life by reason of sin, and then at last a cruel and desolate death. Therefore be assured that He knows all its malignity, and is ready to give all his compassion and all his strength for its overthrow and for its extirpation. Think of Him in his sorrows; in that predominant sadness from which He took his name: and depend upon his sympathy and upon his help in yours. Doubt not the stedfastness of his purpose, whether on earth or in heaven, "to deliver man." For this He submitted to be born of a woman; for this He placed himself under the Law of God; for this He taught and laboured, spake words such as man never spake, and went about doing good; for this He at last bore shame and desertion, insult and anguish, the hiding of his Father's countenance, and a death uncheered by one ray of comfort; for this He rose again, and ascended; for this He ever liveth to make intercession. Trust Him humbly, trust Him wholly; trust Him when you see Him not; and when He seems to be silent to you, trust Him still! Soon shall you find yourself a little cheered, and a little aided: now and then a victory will be vouch-

safed, when it is safe for you; now and then even from defeat you shall arise strengthened for warfare: at last, all shall be peace; you shall be found to have withstood in the evil day, and, having done all, to stand. You shall hear from your Lord the glad "Well done;" and to him that hath overcome He will give the crown of life.

VI.

THE GOSPEL OF THE FALL.

"It shall bruise thy head."—Genesis iii. 15.

HIS third chapter of the Bible is the basis and groundwork of Revelation. It tells us where we are and how we came here; tells us, if not of the origin, yet at least of the human beginning, of evil; tells us of man's Fall, and lifts up the curtain (in part at least) from the scene of man's ruin.

Speaking upon it at this time, in words, I trust, plain and clear to all, warranted by Holy Scripture and true to human experience, we shall find three great topics demanding our notice: The Fall as a history; The Fall as a type; and The Fall in its reversal.

May the Spirit of God move upon the record,

and make it life-like and life-giving to some humble and waiting souls!

I. The Fall as a history.

What could be so worthy a subject for Divine Revelation, as the explanation (so far as man can receive it) of the strange complexities of man's present condition?

Surely it becomes an intelligent being, with whom God has begun to deal, ever so remotely, in the way of information as to the mysteries of his existence, to ask and to expect some light upon the fact that he is a sinner.

The fact that he is a sinner. Does any one of us gainsay that fact? Is any one amongst us ready to stand up before God and plead "Not Guilty" at the bar of his heart-searching judgment?

God forbid! Account for it as you may or as you will, the fact of your being a sinner is impressed upon you by memory, by experience, by conscience, as well as by Revelation; proved by the testimony of an accuser within, whom you have not yet succeeded in drugging or bribing into silence: you know that, if there be a God, and if He be a God of infallible insight and of spotless holiness, you will never be able to feel in the hour

of death, or to say in the day of judgment, I have not sinned: I am altogether clean and clear and pure from evil.

And yet, on the other hand, no reverent or even rational mind will be satisfied to believe that God made us sinful. Reason says, as much as Revelation, "In the beginning it was not so." In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, He "saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." That is what we feel must have been; and Scripture says that it was so.

Therefore the question meets us again, and will meet us at every turn till God answers it, How did I get into that condition in which I find myself? How did man become what he is? a sinner by inclination and by propensity; a sinner in disposition and a sinner in act?

Read, in the face of that question, this third chapter of the Bible. Read it first as a history, and what is its epitome?

"The man whom God had appointed lord of the earth and its inhabitants, was endowed with everything requisite for the development of his nature and the fulfilment of his destiny. In the fruit of

the trees of the garden he had food for the sustenance of his life; in the care of the garden itself, a field of labour for the exercise of his physical strength; in the animal and vegetable kingdom, a capacious region for the expansion of his intellect; in the tree of knowledge, a positive law for the training of his moral nature; and in the woman associated with him, a suitable companion and help. In such circumstances as these he might have developed both his physical and spiritual nature in accordance with the will of God." *

In this most favourable position for maintaining his integrity, a tempter comes to him. The name given to that tempter in Holy Scripture seems to indicate that a spirit already fallen assumed the form of a serpent in his approach to the human being still upright. It is not for us either to explain or to dispute the possible agency of spirit over animal life. We see the same dark hint of such a connection in the miracle of the demoniac, out of whom the unclean spirits pass at the word of Jesus to enter with destructive frenzy into a herd of swine. The spiritual tempter must embody

* Keil and Delitzsch on the Pentateuch, vol. i., p. 91 (Clark's Foreign Theological Library).

himself if he is to speak to man. The very fact of speech from the speechless, of reasoning from the irrational, of counsel from the inferior and direction from the subject, should have sufficed to put man on his guard; to prepare him for mischief, and to warn him against compliance.

Choosing in his subtlety the weaker and more dependent of the two human beings, the tempter addresses to her the first suggestion of evil. In the form of enquiry—enquiry with a view to satisfaction—on the subject of the Creator's regulations, he insinuates the intended doubt as to his equity and benevolence. "Yea, hath God said?" Instead of repelling the question, the woman enters upon it; engages in the discussion, though it be in the first instance but to state the truth. The very next utterance of the tempter is an open denial of the veracity of God. "Ye shall not surely die." The threat is an empty sound. On the contrary, the effect of eating of the forbidden tree shall be—and God knows it—that your eyes shall be opened to mysteries as yet concealed from you; your subject position will be instantly raised into independence, and you yourselves "shall be as gods, knowing good and evil."

Curiosity thus stimulated, pride irritated, and lust awakened, what should follow but the act of rebellion? Having once listened to the tempter, as he arrayed before her the advantages of disobedience, she began to view everything with his eyes; ran over in her mind the beauty and the sweetness and the mysterious properties of the prohibited fruit—and what matters it whether the trial of obedience be made in the matter of an empire or of an apple? the principle is the same in each—"She took of the fruit and did eat, and gave also to her husband with her, and he did eat."

The deed was done: easily done: soon done: a moment may accomplish the ruin of a soul or of a world: and now for its consequences.

(1) The pleasure expected, the dignity predicted, the wisdom promised, where are these? True, the eyes are opened, but to what? Only to a sense of shame, to the consciousness of nakedness: they do know evil—and whose evil? Their own: their own fall, their own uncleanness, their own misery and degradation. The first consequence of sin is shame.

(2) Presently the voice of the Lord God is heard, in the delightful hour of evening, when per-

haps his creatures had heretofore been privileged to draw nigh to Him with something of a more immediate and intimate converse: but how does that voice sound now? The sinners are afraid. They dread the sight of Him. They hide themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden. The dread of God has taken possession of the souls which He had formed in his own image and admitted into his own communion. The second consequence of sin is fear.

(3) But, though they might hide themselves, there is an eye which pierces all darkness, and there is a voice which summons all offenders to the bar of justice. "The Lord God called unto Adam, and said unto him, Where art thou?" And now a third effect of sin begins to unfold itself. Excuses come in, to aggravate the transgression which they seek to palliate. The man hid himself because he was naked. And when that excuse condemned him—inasmuch as their knowledge of evil could only have come through sin—he then throws the blame upon his weaker companion in transgression, careless if in doing so he even implicate God himself. "The woman, whom Thou gavest to be with

me, she gave me of the tree." The woman, in her turn, charges the serpent; and the Judge, in passing sentence, begins with the tempter. The third consequence of sin is self-excusing.

(4) Thus then the fourth result of transgression begins to appear: and that is punishment. Every sin finds out its doer. So was it with the first sin. Each agent in that transaction stands separately and alone at the bar of God.

First the tempter, in that animal form which he had chosen. The serpent shall crawl for ever upon the ground, and eat dust mingled with all its food. There shall be war for ever between man and it. And so also with the spiritual foe who lurks behind it. The whole history of earth shall be that of an incessant warfare between man and his seducer. Bitter shall be the injuries done to the human being in the course of it. The devil shall have great power, and many an agonizing and many a deadly wound shall he inflict upon him who has now listened of his own free will to his lying voice. But in the end victory shall lie with man. At last he shall bruise the serpent's head. Just thus far was the darkness of the Fall lighted up by Revelation. All the rest

was dark. Man's utter ruin shall have one glimmering light in heaven left to it: one hope, obscure and enigmatical in the present, but to be evermore cleared and brightened, as centuries of conflict and suffering run their weary course, by new gleams of intelligence, and at length revealed in all its beauty and in all its strength in the Person of One "born of a woman" that He may redeem the fallen and save the lost. Thus the serpent's curse is darkly interwoven with man's blessing.

Meanwhile, all else is left in dim darkness. The woman shall have a destiny all sorrow. On her way to that mysterious "childbearing" which shall reveal the promised seed and bring in an everlasting righteousness, she shall know nothing but pain and anguish. "In sorrow thou shalt bring forth children;" and the tenderness of woman's love shall but subject her more entirely to the rule, often arbitrary, often capricious, of the husband whom she led into transgression.

And the man: what shall be his future? A life of toil; often excessive, often fruitless: a long struggling with a ground stubborn and barren as implicated in his curse: an eating of his bread in labour and sorrow, until he return to the very dust

from which he was taken. Henceforth, according to the primeval warning, death should work in him until it be accomplished: an immortal sinner—a sinner, that is, immortal in his sinfulness—cannot be, and must not be, upon the earth: henceforward, if there is to be an immortality for man, it must be entered upon through the grave and gate of death; entered as a new gift of God, given only through a propitiation and a resurrection.

(5) And so, finally, a fifth consequence is brought into view in the closing verses: an exclusion from the original Paradise, and from the tree of immortal life within it. "So He drove out the man: and He placed at the east of the garden of Eden Cherubims, and a flaming sword which turned every way, to keep the way of the tree of life."

I cannot close this part of our subject without calling you to notice one feature, not always sufficiently dwelt upon, in the history of the Fall of Man: namely, how God, while punishing sin, is yet seen to be still the God of the sinner; still opening to him a hope, however indistinct, of eventual restoration; still presiding over his steps, however rugged the path by which He must lead him; still providing for necessities which sin itself has

created—Himself (as it is written) making for him —strange and wonderful words—those "coats of skins" with which shame must now clothe him; still therefore in all ways owning, though in displeasure, the souls which He had created, and evermore, according to his own most glorious attribute, "in wrath remembering mercy."

I have sought to present to you, with as little comment as possible, the sacred narrative of Adam's sin and Fall. A thousand questions might be asked upon it, which we cannot answer. It is doubtless one part of our discipline in this life, to be kept humble by a painful ignorance of things high and heavenly. The origin of evil, on the one hand, and the manner in which Adam's sin has affected his children, on the other, are two points upon which the wisest of men can tell us little or nothing. What we know not now, we may perhaps—certainly, if it concerns us—know hereafter.

But in the meantime there is this one thing rendered certain by the inspired record on which we have dwelt: that our condition as it now is, a condition of infirmity, conflict, and sin, was not our original condition; and if not our original

condition, then neither our final condition: that evil which is no part of us, but a superadded circumstance of our being, may yet be cast out of us, shall yet be cast out of us, so that there shall be no trace and no spot and no stain of it left. God hasten it in his time!

II. But now I would look at the history for a few moments in its typical and representative character, and thus show how we ourselves act over and over again the sin of our ancestor, and render ourselves personally liable to that punishment which we speak of (in a certain sense) as hereditary and derived.

Was there ever a truer or a livelier representation than that which is here given us, of the course, progress, and end of temptation as it is now daily acted over again upon this earth?

I would speak plainly here, and commend the words to every man's conscience in the sight of God.

Yes, I address in these pages many who have sinned; sinned personally, repeatedly, and in manifest ways; manifest, I mean, to themselves, however veiled and secret from the eyes of others.

Now I would ask them whether the record of Adam's sin is not also the record of theirs.

(1) You have noticed how the temptation opens. Something is presented just for consideration. Is there any harm—can there be anything really wrong—in doing this or that? Can God really have forbidden it? Yes, the mind makes answer to itself—or, which is the same thing, to the tempter within—it certainly is forbidden; I know it is wrong. I should like it, but I suppose I must not do it.

The words are most of all appropriate to the case of gross sins, but they have their application to all sin; if it but be that of speech, or of temper, of imagination, or of omission.

I must not do it. Still the thought is lodged there. It comes up again and again. I should like it, but it is forbidden.

Now here, my young friends—for to you would I speak, who have not yet crossed the boundary line of actual known sin—here is the vital matter. These ponderings of sin, these parleyings with the temptation, these discussions with yourselves of forbidden indulgences, these are the things which you must resist, which by God's grace you

must put down in yourselves, if you would keep yourselves unspotted and pure in the great matter of the soul's life.

(2) For see how bold the tempter becomes who has once got a hearing. It is true you told him that God had said this or that; that such or such a thing was wrong. But the very answer has emboldened him. He sees that you would like to do it if you could, and in that wavering of the inclination he sees an eventual triumph. He ventures now upon challenging the prohibition; says out, "Ye shall not surely die;" tells how many have done the same thing and not suffered for it; how many have stepped just so far out of the right way, and have soon and easily returned to it; or, if not, have been still prosperous, still successful, still happy: "Ye shall not surely die;" depend upon it, God knows that you will not; God knows that this act which you call sin would make you happier, more manly perhaps, more knowing, more independent of foolish scruples and unnecessary restraints; God knows this, and if He still forbids it, it is unreasonable, it is hard, it is arbitrary: break loose —disobey this once—it will make a man of you.

Such are the thoughts, more or less realized, which pass rapidly, sometimes with the quickness of lightning, through a soul under temptation: and O, for once that they are resisted, how often are they yielded to! yielded to by those who know better, by those who half regret it at the moment, who in the retrospect will repent of it bitterly!

(3) And then how does sin spread itself! It cannot rest till it has drawn others in. The woman must make her husband eat; the friend corrupts his friend, the brother entices his brother: and so a deluge of misery enters the world in one drop of sin.

(4) What shall we say of consequences?

Man, even fallen man, differs from the evil spirit in this; that he still, at least in the early days, is conscious to himself of his own sin; is but half its friend; has many misgivings and many self-reproaches, even though his life is defiled and spoilt with transgressions; and herein, just in this one thing, lies for man a possibility of redemption, which for fallen Angels is not. A man is of two minds; sensual, yet also perceptive of good: he approves the law of God after the

inward man, even when how to perform that which is good he finds not.

Hence shame; hence fear: shame when he sees himself naked; fear when he meets his God at evening, and at the voice, "Where art thou?" must come forth and show himself to his Maker.

O how many young men know the truth of this description! men who cannot quite give up all pretence of belief, cannot shake off the habit of evening prayer, even though they can overbear conscience, and do, and do again, the thing which they know is wrong! Yet even they know the bitterness of that after-shame, which makes them blush before themselves in secret; of that after-dread which haunts and oppresses the soul, when it drags itself back at night just to say its prayers! "Adam and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God amongst the trees of the garden."

And then those excuses. What sin has not its excuse ready? Sometimes, its commonness: Every one commits it. Sometimes the force of individual example: I could not stand alone. Sometimes the influence of a warm affection: My own heart, my

own kindliness and love, led me into it. Sometimes, O how often, circumstances—which are God's providence; or what we call temperament—which is God's creation! Who has not often charged God himself with the authorship of his sins? Why hast Thou made me thus? so impetuous, so passionate, so hot in impulse and in appetite? Or, why hast Thou placed me thus? under influences so strong, so resistless, and in my case all for evil? Where, in short, is he, who, when he has fallen, throws himself on his face before God, takes all the blame, confesses his own wickedness and his own desert of punishment, and cries aloud for mercy to One whom he cannot make his debtor? May it not be said of that man, that, "though he fall, he shall not be cast away?"

III. We have just touched, though with a faint and light hand, the second topic; that of the Fall as a type: and now let us, in conclusion, say one word upon the remaining point; the Fall in its reversal. What does Holy Scripture reveal to us concerning the undoing of this fatal deed, this deed of our first parents, of which not only have we all reaped the bitter fruit, but which we ourselves have done over again, making it our own

choice and act, till certainly we, like them, are without excuse?

The reversal of the Fall is in the work of our Lord Jesus Christ: in his perfect obedience; in his personal victory over every assault of the tempter; in his sufferings voluntarily undergone in working out for us also an eternal redemption; in that death by which He "destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil," and opened, for us men and for our salvation, the gates of the grave and the gates of hell. These things had in them the virtue and power of an entire reversal of the Fall of Adam. Though not yet rendered availing, by a personal appropriation, to the whole race of man; though waiting for a consummation not yet seen, and a result not yet realized; yet they have in them virtue sufficient for the perfect work; they communicate that virtue already to those who truly believe; and they point onward to a time when sin shall be utterly destroyed and cast out of God's creation, and when there shall be "new heavens and a new earth, wherein dwelleth only righteousness."

(1) Read, in this light, as a reversal of Adam's Fall, the record of our Lord's temptation. How the

tempter came to Him, as he came of old to the "mother of all living," and bade Him turn the stone into bread for the support of his sinking, exhausted frame. There was no sin in that: no prohibition like that trampled upon in the Fall. And yet the Saviour would not. Why? Because He knew the voice; knew it for an enemy's voice, and would none of it: because He saw in the suggestion the hint of faithlessness and self-seeking, and would lean, in entire self-renunciation, upon the all-supporting, all-providing hand of God. Then was the Fall reversed. Then did "the strong man armed" meet a stronger than himself, and retire from the encounter foiled and vanquished. This temptation was in the same region as the earliest of all: it had to do with the body, and with its support by food: it came in the most refined of all forms, suggesting an act not wicked: and yet it was repelled; it was refused and overborne by a stronger sense of duty and of the will of God.

(2) Thus has it been, in a lower degree, with all who in Christ's name have gone forth to the conflict with temptation.

Read in this light the lives of saints. See how they have been enabled, by a mightier strength

within, to conquer where Adam fell; to say No to appetite, passion, and lust, and wage a successful warfare with "hosts laid against them."

And read in this light the lives of saints still living. What is a saint? He is one of God's consecrated ones. Not a man of different mould from other men; but one on whom the anointing oil of the Holy Spirit has been poured from on high, enabling him to go forth in God's strength to the common occupations and common trials of life, having within him One greater than all that are in the world. There are saints amongst us, in this Scriptural sense; though, alas! fewer and feebler than they ought to be. There are men who in the busiest or the humblest callings of this restless and troublous world are striving to maintain a consistent Christian conduct, and whom no force of authority or of example can drive or constrain into immorality or dishonesty. In them also we see a reversal of Adam's Fall. In them also we see how the grace of God through Jesus Christ, earnestly sought and carefully fostered, is able to bring strength out of weakness, and to enable men of no peculiar talent, address, or courage, to stand upright and stedfast in that hour of

fiery trial, which tries every man's soul of what sort it is.

(3) And read, finally, in this light, the latest chapters of the Book of God. Read, especially, how in the last chapter of all, the 22nd chapter of the Revelation of St. John, it is expressly said that in the heavenly city there stands in the very midst of its street that tree of life from which the fallen Adam was banished, bearing twelve manner of fruits, and yielding her fruit every month, so that the leaves of the tree are for the healing of the nations. And read too that benediction which stands later still in that latest utterance of Christ to the Churches: "Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city."

Miss not, beloved friends, your share in that glorious promise! Fight now the good fight of faith! "Put on the whole armour of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all to stand!" So shall your last end be peace. So shall an entrance be ministered to you abundantly into the everlasting kingdom of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

VII.

THE GOSPEL OF THE FLOOD.

"I do set my bow in the cloud."—Genesis ix.

THE Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the Call—these are the great landmarks of primeval history.

It is a magnificent record; not more in the marvel of its preservation, than in the character of its facts.

Many things in it are hard to be understood: how could it be otherwise?

Many things in it stimulate curiosity: is it not well?

Many things in it baffle philosophy, irritate scepticism, furnish forth cavils: may not the humble Christian learn a lesson even from this? learn that God's teaching is different from man's? his foolish-

ness (as an Apostle writes) wiser than our wisdom, his weakness stronger than our strength?

We are not indeed to despise the added light which Philology or Science may throw upon the Book of God. Still less are we to tremble at each new discovery, as though it might shake the foundations of Divine Truth. Truth and the Truth must always be at one: if we cannot always see how, we must be patient, we must be trustful, we must wait and pray.

Meanwhile I fear not to say that each one of these four great landmarks of which I have spoken —the Creation, the Fall, the Flood, the Call—is essential to the understanding of all truth and to the consistency of all history. Take any one away, and there is a breach made which you cannot heal. You will have to come back for the discarded item, in order to understand where you are, and what; where you are in God's world, and what you are in God's sight.

Let us take one of these great revelations by itself now, and ask what it says to us.

The Flood. The Deluge. What Prophecy calls "the waters of Noah." Surely there is enough here to instruct and to solemnize, even if there be

many things about it which we cannot explain and cannot settle.

Between the Fall and the Flood there lie upwards of sixteen centuries.

A long time, measured by years. Longer than from Abraham to Malachi: longer than from David to Mahomet: longer than from Constantine to us.

But not a long time, when reckoned by generations. The chronology of Scripture tells us that Adam himself lived fifty-six years into the lifetime of Methuselah, and that Methuselah lived till the very year of the Flood. Adam may have known Methuselah, and Methuselah reached to the Deluge.

One bright spot marks the interval. There was a saint of God between Adam and Noah. Mysterious, like the rest of the record, when you begin to ask how: but in itself scarcely mysterious, to those who believe in the grace of God, and know that He is the same yesterday and to-day and for ever. "Enoch walked with God: and he was not: for God took him." "By faith Enoch was translated that he should not see death; and was not found, because God had translated him; for before his translation he had this testimony, that

he pleased God. And without faith it is impossible to please Him."

Not promise only cheered that dark time: grace too, grace in the heart of man and grace in the life of man, proved, to such as would enquire, that God had not forsaken the race which had gone astray.

And Noah too walked with God. He "was a just man, and perfect in his generations," that is, amongst those of his time; "and Noah walked with God."

These experiences, even more than that one dark hint of Prophecy, given on the day of the Fall, must have given hope and reassurance to the drooping hearts of men.

All else was dark enough around them. The curse had speedily operated: the toil of man, and the suffering of woman; yes, and worse things than pain and weariness; deeds of unnatural blood-shed: a brother's blood crying from the ground, and the murderer driven out, with a mark set upon him, to be a fugitive and vagabond on the earth: these had been the beginnings of sorrows: and what had they grown to!

"The earth itself was corrupt before God, and the earth was filled with violence."

Sin, like leaven, soon spreads; spreads in a soul, spreads in a life, spreads in a community, spreads in a world.

Dark hints are given as to the source of this evil —of its developement, I mean—for the root and the germ of it was in the Fall.

We read of "sons of God" taking to themselves wives of the "daughters of men." As though perhaps there was a nobler and a less noble race even among the fallen: the race of Seth, with men "calling upon the name of the Lord;" numbering amongst its descendants the saintly Enoch and the righteous Noah: and on the other hand, the race of Cain, "gone out from the presence of the Lord" eastward from Eden, to dwell in a city of his own building, apart from the repentant Adam and his worshipping household; and counting among his offspring an Enoch and a Lamech of his own; a Lamech marked by a Cain-like blood-shed, even as the other Lamech rejoices with a resigned and pious joy in his son Noah as given to comfort them "concerning their work and toil of their hands, because of the ground which the Lord hath cursed." It may be so: we know not. It may be that the riddles of the sixth chapter of

the Bible are to be read by this key; that the race of Seth began to intermarry with the race of Cain; and that, as is usual in such "unequal yokings," the worse rises not to the better, but the better sinks down to the worse.

And although we are to conceive of deeds of strength—of "mighty men" and "men of renown" —marking the fearful period which followed hereupon; yet what is might without right? What is human prowess or human wisdom, divorced from the recollection and from the blessing of God? "God saw that the wickedness of man was great in the earth, and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually. It repented the Lord"—so speaks He in condescension to our infirmity, adopting the language not only of human sense but of human feeling—"It repented the Lord that He had made man on the earth, and it grieved Him at his heart." A scene of lust, rapine, and outrage, occupies (with one exception) the whole face of the earth.

In these soft days we have almost lost the plain name of sin, and the very conception of its hideousness in the sight of God. There is indeed a humanity falsely so called, prevalent enough and

to spare amongst us; crying out at the sight of physical suffering, and counting punishment cruel as soon as it becomes painful. But this, so far from being in itself a good sign, is in reality but one expression of the very evil now under notice. We have lost the conception of sin, and therefore we do not see why sin should suffer. So far indeed as sin causes pain to ourselves; when it comes nigh to us in the form of peril to our homes, or wrong to our fortunes; then we demand satisfaction: then we find that sin has inconveniences, and for the moment desire its coercion. But for sin in itself—sin as against another man—still more, sin as against God—who feels as he ought? who in deed and in truth feels at all?

If we would see what sin is, we must read not treatises on morals, not poems of sentiment, not speeches of philanthropists, but another book altogether: the Book of God: the Old Testament, to show us what sin has cost in judgment; the New Testament, to show us what sin has cost in expiation.

Instead of carrying our preconceptions to the Divine Word, and judging it by them; discarding from our Canon of Scripture, or from our system of

doctrine, everything in Revelation which squares not with our ideas of what God ought to do and (let me say it plainly) of what God ought to be; let us open the oracles of truth for an opposite purpose: to learn what God has said, and what God has done; what He has judged necessary in the way of retribution, and what He has declared himself to be in his estimate of the sinfulness of sin.

It may be that the time will yet come, for the Church if not for the world, when it shall be felt that the Old Testament Scriptures, instead of being obsolete and superseded, are of paramount and predominant use. It is they which contain those first lessons of the Divine displeasure against sin, and also those records of the working of the human heart in its deepest agonies of repentance for sin, which, in proportion as they are learnt, give to the Gospel itself its chief value, and in proportion as they are disparaged or set aside, carry away with them all that makes it worth while for a Saviour to have suffered. If these better times should come round again, how will men blush to think that they wasted precious time in discussing the probability of the Deluge—its extent in space, or its compatibility with facts of science—before they had

yet laid to heart its solemn lessons, and learnt from it what sin is, in its character and in its consequences!

I. First, then, regard the record before us as a history: a history having a twofold aspect: an aspect of judgment, and an aspect too of mercy.

1. "God," St. Peter says, "spared not the old world." He "brought in a flood upon the world of the ungodly." He who made can destroy. He who in the beginning "divided the waters from the waters" can break up the fountains of the great deep, and open again the windows of heaven at his pleasure. The machinery for so doing is in his hand. The Creator must be the Owner, and the Owner of all things can unmake or remake all things at his will.

The Flood was a judgment. The record of it is "written for our admonition, upon whom the ends of the world are come."

When sin reaches a certain point, it demands the interposition of God. It is so in individual life. "God is provoked every day." He is long-suffering and of great pity. He gives a thousand chances. He calls and calls again. He reproves gently. He rebukes sternly. He chastens tenderly. He smites

severely. Every sinful career is marked by such gradations of discipline. At last the cup is full. Long trifled with, "God is not mocked:" and he who would not have Him for his Father must at last know Him as his Judge.

It is so with individual lives, and it is so with the life of communities and of the world.

Long did God strive, by conscience and by his Spirit, with that wicked generation to which Noah testified. Even when judgment was resolved upon, and its coming heralded, an interval (it would seem) of one hundred and twenty years was granted to mankind before its execution. "My Spirit shall not always strive with man: yet his days shall be an hundred and twenty years." "The long-suffering of God waited," St. Peter says, "in the days of Noah." In the meantime, that sign might be added to prediction, and sight to hearing, a long-continued preparation made ready the Ark which was to save one family. "By it," by the Ark, Noah "condemned the world." By it he proved his faith, and by it he rebuked the obstinate infidelity of his generation. All that time, all those years, whosoever would might "hear and fear" and be saved.

And even when judgment fell; even when it was too late, either for the world or any of its inmates, to escape the punishment; yet a dark hint is given as to the difference between punishment and perdition; and St. Peter says again, that even "spirits in prison," "once disobedient in the days of Noah," received in their place of "safe keeping" a visit from the Saviour, preaching to them that Gospel which had comfort in it even for them, and showing that even a forfeited life, even a death incurred through sin, does not of necessity bring after it an everlasting damnation.

2. Thus the record of judgment passes on into a record of mercy. Like all God's judgments, it was tempered with mercy. St. Paul tells us of some persons in the Church of Corinth, who for a particular sin—that of profaning the Lord's Table—not only were "weak and sickly," but even "slept," were sick even unto death, "that they might not be condemned with the world;" that the destruction of the body might even (under grace) be the saving of the soul. Was it not thus—may not St. Peter's words imply that it was thus—with some at least of those who perished in the great Flood? Brought down at last to penitence and faith, by

the very arrival of the mighty waters; crying to God at last in deep contrition as they were swept to ruin; even for them, for some of them, there may have been mercy still, and a life lost here have been found there.

But certainly towards the one righteous house mercy triumphed over judgment.

How wonderful the record of that Divine tenderness which guided and watched over the seed of the new world! How minute the providence, how strong the protection, how sufficient the provision, how sure the salvation! "Come thou and all thy house into the ark. . . . . The Lord shut him in. . . . . The waters increased and bare up the ark. . . . . And the ark went upon the face of the waters. . . . . Noah only remained alive. . . . God remembered Noah. . . . . And God made a wind to pass over the earth, and the waters assuaged. . . . . And the ark rested in the seventh month, on the seventeenth day of the month, upon the mountains of Ararat. . . . . And God spake unto Noah, saying, Go forth of the ark. . . . . Bring forth with thee every living thing that is with thee. . . . . Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth." And when

Noah builded an altar unto the Lord, and offered burnt-offerings on the altar, then the Lord (it is written) "smelled a sweet savour, and said in his heart, I will not again curse the ground any more for man's sake; for the imagination of man's heart is evil from his youth; neither will I again smite any more everything living, as I have done. While the earth remaineth, seed-time and harvest, and cold and heat, and summer and winter, and day and night shall not cease."

And they have not ceased. Four thousand years have set their seal to the promise, and ratified the new charter of the Creator to his restored and renewed earth. We, my friends, live under that charter still, and it has never failed us nor been broken yet!

And thus that mercy which had been shown in preservation was shown also in reconstruction.

No revelation (it has been well said) could have been at that moment so reasonable, as one which renewed to the survivors of the Deluge the possession of Creation gifts. What must have been the misgivings, the right and reasonable misgivings, of that little band, emerging from a year's imprisonment upon a scene desolate and without inhabitant,

as to the hopes and prospects of a race once given up to so fearful a judgment? Nothing less than the express word of God himself could have given them courage to begin again, under circumstances so discouraging, the daily round of toil, and the weary struggle with an earth now doubly barren. That word was not withheld: at that moment it was the best of Gospels. "Be fruitful, and multiply, and replenish the earth: and the fear of you and the dread of you," few and feeble as you may count yourselves, "shall be upon every beast of the earth. . . . Every moving thing that liveth shall be meat for you. . . . Bring forth abundantly in the earth, and multiply therein. . . . . And I, behold, I establish my covenant with you, and with your seed after you. . . . Neither shall all flesh be cut off any more by the waters of a flood. . . . When I bring a cloud over the earth, the bow shall be seen in the cloud, and I will remember my covenant." Yes, that secure replanting in a forfeited inheritance was the one first want of the failing spirit of the faithful few.

And now a fresh start is given to the human being. Warned, and solemnized, and comforted, he is set again to his task, of being God's represen-

tative to his lower creation, God's king and God's priest upon the earth given back to him. Who has not had occasion to thank God for such an opportunity, on a humbler scale, in his own little life? When, as children, we have been brought to a due sense of some childish transgression; when we have been made at last to feel that we were in fault, and a parent's forgiveness has set its seal to a parent's correction, and we are taken back into favour, tried again and trusted, loved again and loving, to be as before and to do (we hope) better; who does not look back upon such a moment as one of the purest and tenderest of all his recollections, a very token and glimpse and foretaste of heaven? Such was the mercy shown in the history before us. Alas! how soon to be overcast! how soon to be disappointed, forgotten, and sinned away! O these fresh starts, so often vouchsafed to us; these opportunities of beginning anew and of perfecting reformation; how vain, how profitless, how condemning! even like that departure, from his home in the soul, of the evil spirit, to be followed, after brief pause and respite, by a return in sevenfold force to the merely "swept and garnished" dwelling! The mercy is God's: the loss is ours!

II. We have spoken of the Deluge as a fact in history; having an aspect of judgment, and an aspect of mercy. We have now briefly to think of it in its uses; as a type, as a prophecy, and as a warning.

1. St. Peter, in a passage of his First Epistle, already referred to for a different purpose, speaks thus of the typical character of the event now before us. He speaks of those "who sometime were disobedient, when once the long-suffering of God waited in the days of Noah, while the ark was a preparing, wherein"—or rather, "into which (ark) few, that is, eight souls, were saved (brought safe) through water: the like figure whereunto, even Baptism"—or more exactly, "to which" water, the water of the Deluge, "answering," corresponding, as the antitype to the type—"Baptism doth also now save us; not the putting away of the filth of the flesh, but the answer (or, interrogation) of a good conscience toward God;" not the mere outward washing, but the confession of a true believing heart; "by the resurrection of Jesus Christ."

That water through which Noah and his family passed into their Ark—for already it was beginning to rise around them when at the last moment they

entered its sheltering refuge—was like the water of holy Baptism, through which a Christian, penitent and believing, finds his way into the Church of the living God. Through the water of Baptism, in obedience to our Lord's charge and command, we pass into that Holy Catholic Church, which is the house and family of God. Only, St. Peter says to us, rest not in the form—in the outward application of the sacred water—but see that you have the heart of Baptism also. See that you believe in Jesus Christ with all your heart, and confess Him honestly with your lips and in your life. Then shall you be safe in the refuge of a Saviour's body, even as the one chosen family was borne up in its Ark above the surging waters. So shall you pass securely "the waves of this troublesome world," and reach finally "the land of everlasting life, there to reign with Christ world without end."

2. Such is the Flood as a type. The same Apostle exhibits it to us also as a prophecy.

He speaks in his Second Epistle, written at the close of life, of certain scoffers who should come in the last days, walking after their own lusts, and saying, "Where is the promise of Christ's coming?

for since the fathers fell asleep all things continue as they were from the beginning of the creation." Now, St. Peter says, it is their own fault if they cannot read more truly the lesson of the Deluge. They ought to know that the heavens and the earth were originally so constituted by the word of God, as to make a Deluge possible. The earth was first brought to consistency out of and by means of the water of Chaos; and by the arrangement then made the same water was ready (as it were) for that work of judgment by which the old world was punished for sin. If they had remembered this, he says, they would have been prepared for that other revelation, which destines the element of fire, in its turn, to be the agent of a final and more fearful judgment. "The heavens and the earth which are now, by the same word are kept in store, reserved unto fire against the day of judgment and perdition of ungodly men." Let them remember that God measures not time as we measure it: "one day is with Him as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day." Delay, as men count delay, is no proof of uncertainty. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise." Rather He "is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing

that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance." But, though it tarry, yet "the day of the Lord will come, as a thief in the night." Then shall the very "elements melt with fervent heat;" "the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up."

Such is the prophecy. The Flood of waters becomes in its turn the prediction of a last flood of fire. He who foretold the one—and notwithstanding long delay the word was fulfilled—may be believed when He threatens the others, and no pause or respite can defeat the certainty of the performance.

"Seeing then that all these things shall be dissolved, what manner of persons ought ye to be in all holy conversation and godliness!"

3. Finally, there is one special warning appended by our Lord Jesus Christ himself to the Scriptural record of the great Deluge.

"As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be. For as in the days that were before the flood, they were eating and drinking, marrying and giving in marriage, until the day that Noah entered into the ark, and knew not until the flood came, and took them all away;

so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." A state of general unconcern is no security against the coming of the day of judgment. On the contrary, it is a predicted sign. The Flood is in this point also a type of the last judgment. The inhabitants of the earth saw no danger. To them, as to us now, all seemed to be as from the beginning. In one respect even more so; because they had not yet, as we have, proofs of the Almighty power of God to punish. Their fate is written for our admonition. By so much less is our excuse for carelessness than was theirs. But in this we are alike. Everything speaks of security, save just one thing only. Long continuance, uniform experience, this points to safety. Generation after generation has lived out its appointed time, and known no sudden shock of judgment. Nature runs its daily, its monthly, its yearly round: seed-time and harvest, summer and winter, fail not in their revolutions: surely the laws of the universe are constant, and the more we learn of them the more constant!

Yes, all is safe for us in our carelessness—except one thing.

The men of Noah's generation had heard him

speak of a threatened destruction: he had called to them in the name of his God and theirs, and nothing had yet come of it.

When they saw him building his Ark, well might they scoff and ridicule his credulity: the laugh was still with them—he was the visionary, he was the enthusiast. Not until the one hundred and twenty years reached their destined end, not until the floodgates of heaven were actually broken up, did they begin to suspect that there might have been something in it after all! Eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building, marrying and giving in marriage—even thus did they spend their last days of reprieve, and knew not until the Flood came and took them all away!

And we, my friends, like them, have everything, save one only, in favour of confidence and of carelessness. That one thing, for us as for them, is just the word of God: his prediction, his solemn warning, of a judgment to come. It speaks to us in a Book which may be disregarded; sometimes in a Sermon which may be criticized or talked away; sometimes in a voice within, echoing the revelation, but still in a tone which can be silenced, which is daily silenced in a thousand hearts. And there is

this also: the revelation of judgment, in our case, fixes not the day nor the year; declares it to be indiscoverable; warns us that it may be remote; in the same degree, no doubt, encourages the thoughtless in their thoughtlessness!

Yes, Christian friends; but "in the end it shall speak and not lie." "The vision is yet for an appointed time"—and we know not the time within a century nor within a millennium—"but in the end it shall speak and not lie."

"Though it tarry," then, "wait for it."

But we live, as that doomed generation lived of old, in all the occupations of a busy, a distracted, or a tranquil being; carry on the work of life—and we do well to do so; enjoy the pleasures of life—and, if God were in them for us, this too were well; exercise the affections of life, wind them round our very hearts, and scarcely admit the possibility of replacing one of them by that which is Divine. In the midst of all these things, without further notice, will come, for us, as for them of old, the revelation of a searching and consuming judgment. "As the days of Noah were, so shall also the coming of the Son of Man be." O, my friends, "who shall live when God doeth this?" Which amongst us is

ready, either for the summons to go, or for the cry, "He comes?" Which amongst us is ready? Let the question prompt self-examination; quicken prayer, consecrate common duties, and break off (by God's grace) some obstinate sins!

"The Lord shut him in." Then he was safe: and he knew it. Let us seek the same grace, enter the same refuge, and we too shall be found of Him in peace, believing, watching, resting, safe!

VIII.

CHRIST THE LORD OF NATURE.

"And they feared exceedingly, and said one to another, What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"—Mark iv. 41.

" N his head were many crowns." Such is the vision of Christ in his return to judgment.

We are to seek to set before our minds now one of these many crowns.

Christ the Lord of Nature.

And what then is Nature?

Christ is a Person, a living Person. God grant that none of us may still need to be taught who and what He is! Nature is a personification: one of those lively figures by which human language sums up under a sort of personal title a vast aggregate of things. Nature is the sum total of

those material existences which surround us, and of those agencies which God set going in Creation, and has kept in orderly movement from the first day until now. Nature, in the sense in which we now use it, means the world of matter, and the laws (that is, the habits) of its working.

Now we are to think of Christ to-day as the Lord of this Nature; the Lord and Master of that world of matter in or amidst which man dwells, and of the laws (that is, the habits) of its working.

If Holy Scripture be listened to, He is so of right. For St. John says that "all things were made by Him, and without Him was not anything made that was made." And St. Paul, that "God created all things by Jesus Christ." And again, that "all things were created by Him and for Him, and in Him all things consist;" all things have their coherence and their consistency in the same Person, our Lord Jesus Christ, by whom God made them. And so once more we read in the Epistle to the Hebrews, that "by Him God made the worlds," and that Christ still "upholds all things by the word of his power." There is no lordship like that of creation. He who made,

He who upholds all things, is the Lord of all things by the highest, the alone indefeasible title.

Here then is the root and spring of that dominion which we ascribe to Christ in describing Him as the Lord of Nature.

But our purpose is to assist ourselves in grasping this mighty reality, by seeing what our Lord Jesus Christ in the days of his flesh actually did upon earth in proof of this lordship. We would dwell upon some of those acts by which He claimed and by which He exemplified his ownership of things created.

The recorded miracles of Christ wrought upon what is called external Nature, are altogether nine in number.

(1) There is the first of all his "signs;" the water made wine at the marriage feast of Cana.

(2) There is the miraculous draught of fishes on the sea of Tiberias.

(3) There is the stilling of the tempest on the same waters.

(4) There is the feeding of the five thousand with a few loaves and fishes.

(5) There is the walking on the sea by night,

with its marvellous accompaniments of fear and power.

(6) There is the miraculous feeding of the four thousand.

(7) There is the miracle of the piece of money in the fish's mouth.

(8) There is the withering of the fruitless fig-tree on the eve of his Passion.

(9) There is the second miraculous draught of fishes, by which He showed himself alive to his disciples after his Passion.

All these are works of sovereignty over Nature; over the material world in which man lives, and over its common laws of working.

(1, 4, 6) First, there is a class of miracles (three in number) which had their place in what we may call productive Nature; in those processes which have to do with the supply of food for man's life.

Seated at the marriage feast in Cana of Galilee, Jesus marks a deficiency in the provision of wine. He came, unlike the Baptist, eating and drinking; mingling in human society, and teaching us, by word and example, how therein to abide with God. In Him there was nothing morose, no-

thing ungenial; with Him there was a time for all things; yes, even for the unbending of the knit brow in cheerful converse with those whom He came to save. Therefore, instead of seizing the opportunity to enforce abstemiousness or abstinence, He rather seized the opportunity to exemplify kindliness; to remove the embarrassment of the host, and to furnish forth his table with miraculous supplies. The attendants are bidden to fill a number of large vessels with water —that there might be no pretence afterwards of collusion or deceit—and then from these ample pitchers, newly filled with water, the astonished servants find themselves drawing forth excellent wine. It was a proof of the Lordship of Christ over Nature. Those processes which He, upholding all things by the word of his power, commonly makes the condition of a successful vintage, He here by the same word dispenses with or precipitates. It is one of those proofs of power which the most ignorant and the least spiritual can appreciate. As the Evangelist says, He thus "manifested forth his glory, and his disciples believed on Him."

Surrounded for three long days in the wilder-

ness by a patient and now hungering multitude, He at length bids his disciples to feed them from their scanty stores. With every preparation calmly made for a meal, the orderly arrangement, the reclining posture, the preliminary blessing, He takes the five loaves, one by one, into his hands, breaks them into pieces, and by means of his disciples distributes to the five thousand guests. The satisfying of hunger is a thing which allows of no mistake; and the miracle was wrought in the open air, in broad daylight, and with numerous spectators, upon whose minds it acted with unusual strength. It was repeated afterwards, on another occasion, under circumstances only just less (if less) astounding.

He who bringeth food out of the earth—wine that maketh glad the heart of man, and bread to strengthen man's heart—was here manifestly present in his own world, purposing to attract the attention of his creatures by the works of his hands to the words of his lips.

(2, 7, 9) Next, there is a class of miracles (also three in number) proving the dominion of Christ over animated Nature.

After long discourse to the multitudes who thronged the beach listening, Jesus bids the fishermen of the boat in which He had sat speaking, to launch out into the deep water and let down their nets for a draught. They had toiled all the night, and had taken nothing: it seemed as though daylight and the stir of men promised less still: yet in obedience to a voice which carried authority as well as persuasion in its tones, at his word they will let down the net. This done, they enclose a vast multitude of fishes—and the net breaks. One of the men, afterwards to be a great Apostle, finds his sins brought to remembrance by a Presence so Divine, and even entreats his future Master to depart from him. And when that wrong use of the miracle is corrected, and the fearful soul has been reassured by the promise of work to be done hereafter, not in his poor calling as a fisherman, but in the souls of men, then he and his friends join themselves finally to the company of Jesus: "when they had brought their ships to land, they forsook all, and followed Him."

The very same sign after his Resurrection was

employed to confirm and consolidate the same conviction. "Cast the net on the right side of the ship, and ye shall find. They cast therefore, and now they were not able to draw it for the multitude of fishes."

What was this but the exercise of the same power which still congregates the fishes of the sea here and not there in their season; bids them, by an instinct which the Creator only could have implanted, obey certain laws, and minister in definite ways to man's dominion? What was it but to say, not by word but by infallible sign, "The Lord of Nature is here—and I that speak unto you am He?"

Of the same kind was that other, less conspicuous but even more singular miracle, which, at the need of Him who had on earth neither silver nor gold, brought to a particular spot a fish having in his mouth a particular coin; the required offering, for the temple service, of One who might, He said, as the very Son of the Great King, have claimed an exemption from that tribute.

This, too, is an example of the Lordship of Christ over animated Nature.

(3, 5) Thirdly, we have two remarkable examples of the sovereignty of Christ over elemental Nature, over winds and storms, over air and sea.

At the close of a long day's teaching, our Lord craved an interval of seclusion and repose. "Let us go over," He said to his disciples, "to the other side of the lake." As they made the transit, there came on a sudden storm. The wind rose, and the waves beat into the ship, till it was now full of water. Through all the tumult and agitation of the scene, Christ, the Lord of Nature, slept calmly. "He was in the hinder part of the ship, asleep on a pillow." At last, reluctantly (it may be) and reverently, the disciples roused Him; not without something of surprise in their tone, that He should so long have left them to suffer. "Carest Thou not," they said, "that we perish?" "Lord, save us: we perish." Then He rose; stilled first the storm of terror within by the majestic remonstrance, "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" and then rebuked the wind and the raging of the water—as though seeing in their violence a token of that disturbing power of evil which had brought havoc and ruin everywhere into God's handiwork—and restored

by that word of reproof the sea to its calm and the wind to its silence. Well might they who witnessed that instant change in the most unruly elements of nature draw from it the wondering inference, "What manner of man is this, that even the wind and the sea obey Him?"

At a later point in the Gospel history, on the night after the feeding of the five thousand, a yet more marvellous proof was given of the dominion of Christ our Lord over the elements which He created. After that weary day of instruction first, and then of bodily ministration to the vast multitudes which surrounded Him, He had for once desired to be left alone even by the disciples. His soul craved a protracted season of Divine communion. "When He had sent the multitudes away, He went up into a mountain apart to pray." Doubtless He foreknew also the lesson by which He was about to discipline his disciples to higher attainments in faith and grace. For the present they were sent without Him across the waters of that same well-known sea. Again they had experience of its liability to sudden tempests. "The ship was in the midst of the sea, tossed with waves." "The wind was contrary." "It was now

dark," St. John adds, "and Jesus was not come to them. And the sea arose by reason of a great wind that blew." From his mountain solitude Christ marked them with a considerate eye; marked, and felt for them, but as yet interposed not. He saw here a needful training; a discipline of fear and patience, not for the present joyous but grievous, yet out of which should be perfected afterwards a peaceable fruit of righteousness. "He saw them toiling in rowing;" and yet till the fourth, the latest, watch of the night He came not to their rescue. And when He came, how did He manifest himself? In a way most unexpected, and most startling. "In the fourth watch of the night Jesus went unto them, walking on the sea." By the power of his own almighty will, He constrained the liquid wavering water to support the footsteps of its Creator. The disciples, seeing Him thus walking on the sea, and apparently (St. Mark adds) purposing to pass by them, thought they saw a spirit, and cried out for fear. But it was his own voice of power and love, which spake and said to them, "Be of good cheer: it is I; be not afraid." And then, passing with characteristic impetuosity from despondency to over-courage, Peter asks that

a proof of his Lord's presence may be given in enabling him also to walk safely upon the deep: and He who afterwards gave a doubting Apostle the sign which he demanded of his risen life, though He seemed to chide him for demanding it—and who is pleased sometimes to vouchsafe to doubters now a token which they ought not to require of his living grace and love—so, here also, for the more confirmation of the faith, bade Peter come to Him, as he desired, upon the water; and when faith failed, and fear led to sinking, and he who had been so brave to come, yet, seeing the wind boisterous, had to cry out in terror, "Lord, save me," still again that prayer too was heard; "Jesus stretched forth his hand, and caught him, and said unto him, O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?" What a parable, my friends, for all time! the sinking of courage through unbelief, and the restoration of safety through reviving faith! "When they were come into the ship, the wind ceased. Then they that were in the ship came and worshipped Him, saying, Of a truth Thou art the Son of God." It was the inference of truth and soberness from the manifestation of the Lordship of Christ over elemental Nature.

(8) In the last place, we have one example—one only amongst all the nine—of the sovereignty of Christ in the domain of what may be called morbid Nature; over those processes of disease and decay by which Nature herself bears testimony to man's sin and fall and ruin.

On the day corresponding to that which we commonly call the Monday in Passion Week, our Lord, passing from his night's sojourn at Bethany to his day's work in the faithless and now doomed city, observed at some distance a fig-tree already (at that early season of the year) clad with leaves, and therefore, much more, promising fruit: for in the fig-tree, it is said, the fruit appears before the leaves. This tree seemed, as it were, to make an unusual profession. Before the regular season it displayed those leaves which were commonly the index of existing fruit. Other fig-trees at that season had neither leaves nor fruit: this single tree had the one, and thereby professed to offer also the other. But when the Saviour approached it, He found leaves only. Not then for being fruitless, but for being false, He took it as the type of a nation and of a soul. Even such was Jerusalem, the holy city: even such was the degenerate house

of Israel: full of profession, empty of performance: having a form of godliness, but denying the power thereof. He took then this tree—this *thing*, remember—this *thing*, towards which therefore there could be no cruelty or unkindness done—as a type of what Israel was, and of what should befall it under the hand of God's judgment. "No man," He said to it, "eat fruit of thee hereafter for ever." "His disciples heard it;" and when the next morning they trod again, for the first time afterwards in daylight, the same path from Bethany to Jerusalem, they were eye-witnesses of the fulfilment of that sentence: "they saw the fig-tree dried up from the roots:" they saw, in other words, the divine sovereignty of Christ, as before over the productive, and over the animated, and over the elemental parts of Nature, so here over its morbid workings—over that department of Nature which bears witness to a fall from an original perfection, and to an infection of sin and death which has spread itself over that face of Creation upon which God looked in the beginning and pronounced it to be very good.

"Christ the Lord of Nature."

1. It was necessary, Christian friends—we speak

not beyond what is written, for so God ordered it —that the Son of God, coming down from heaven for the redemption and salvation of men, should prove himself to be very God by many infallible and irresistible signs. It was in mercy as well as in wisdom that He furnished this demonstration. If He had not openly asserted, and openly claimed, and openly demonstrated his Divinity, man might have refused the message for the simple want of having his attention turned perforce to the Messenger. What could the simple peasants or fishermen of Galilee have known of a Gospel which offered only philosophical or metaphysical satisfactions as to its authority and its origin? It pleased God, designing to instruct and to bless and to save, to give proofs of that design intelligible to the most ignorant and level to the humblest of mankind. What could be so forcible, to guests seated at a feast, or to multitudes hungering in a desert, as the production before their eyes of a supply of needed wine, or the offering to their distress of an ample provision of bread? What could be more impressive, to a company of hungry fishermen, who had spent their night in fruitless and vexatious efforts after a

draught which came not, than the simple direction where to cast, and the instant experience of a superabundant reward for obeying it? What could be more overwhelming, in its simple and direct argument for the Divinity of the Presence in which they stood, than to find a tempest, which had lain heavy all the night upon experienced mariners in those waters, stilled in a moment by the authoritative word of One who, in outward appearance, was a man like themselves? or to see the uniform experience of long years contradicted, to their very senses, by the unstable element of water being made to support the footsteps of a person in flesh and blood, corporeal and material, as concerning his human nature, even as they? These things, and such as these, are indications of God's working, such as it was not less wise than merciful to accord in the first instance to an unlettered and unphilosophical, but on that very account the more straightforward and competent tribunal. Without miracle, Revelation could hardly have gained its first footing in a busy, pre-occupied, and unspiritual world. Miracle is God's call to attention: God's token and signal that He is about to speak.

2. We might go further, and say that, if Christ was in deed and in truth the very and eternal Son of God, it could scarcely be but that He should assert below his dominion over the works of God's creation, and over the processes of God's providence. We do not ask any one to begin with the miracles; to regard power, and still more the record of power centuries afterwards, as the one irresistible proof of the truth and Divine origin of a Revelation. This has been done—done perhaps too long—done certainly in this age without conviction. But this we say: that, when Christ has been proved to come from God by his words of Divine wisdom and by his character of Divine goodness, then we expect of Him the third seal, which is the seal of Omnipotent strength. Then things which would have been unnatural, and almost indemonstrable, in another, become natural and almost to be expected and anticipated in Him. That Christ, being Divine, showed himself to be so by visible and sensible evidences below, needs just as much and just as little proof as any fact of history or any the commonest incident of this common human life. He who is God as well as Man will *probably* do God's works

—works of creative, of omnipotent, strength—as well as speak God's works and live God's life below.

3. Yet let us be careful how we speak of miracles, such as those on which we have dwelt to-day, as if they were indeed contradictions of God's natural laws, or contraventions of God's providential operations. It has been well and truly urged that, on the contrary, each one of our Lord's miracles was rather the reparation of a broken law than the breach of a law obeyed. With one exception—needing a word by itself—every single miracle now touched upon was the restoration of a harmony impaired, the removal (for the moment) of a discord introduced, by sin. What is want, what is hunger, what is fear, what is a raging sea or a howling tempest, but something which breaks in upon the sweet concord and unity of the mighty universe as God made it? When Christ wrought a miracle upon Nature, it was to give a glimpse of some good thing lost, of some perfect thing deteriorated, of some joyous and glorious thing spoilt and ruined, by reason of the Fall, and to be brought in again and given back to man through the Redemption which is in

Him. It was as the Creator that He put aside for the moment one of Nature's bad habits; because that habit itself testified of sin, and because He would promise deliverance for "the creation itself also from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God." And if there was just one exception to this rule of his miraculous working; just one instance in which He interposed his Omnipotence, not to heal, but to destroy; yet even there, even in the one miracle of the fruitless fig-tree, He was ministering to a spiritual if not to a physical harmony: He was teaching a lesson, in a lifeless object, for the warning and edification of souls, and in the same degree evoking out of a present disarrangement and disorganization the seed of a future and an eternal reconciliation.

4. In the miracles which attest the sovereignty of Christ over Nature we have one of the surest grounds of comfort for Christian souls. And this (1) in their literal and (2) in their parabolical significance.

(1) There can be no greater comfort to Christian persons than to feel that their Lord and Saviour is the Sovereign of the universe in which they dwell.

When they are exposed to any of the manifold perils which befall us through the world that is seen; when they are in danger by land or by sea; when tempests shake their homes, or want threatens their families; when they are compelled to ask, "What shall I eat? or what shall I drink?" or when those dearest to them are tossed on a stormy ocean, or left to the cruel mercies of an Indian sun or an Arctic winter; how strong the consolation which tells of a Saviour omnipotent over Nature herself, without whom not a sparrow falls to the ground, and who can at his pleasure turn the very wilderness into a pasture, or allay the raging of the elements against his people, his chosen!

(2) And surely in those more desolate wants which depress, and in those fiercer storms which agitate the *soul*, they find comfort, neither feeble nor fanciful, in the record of His marvellous working below, who fed famishing thousands with bread from heaven, and said to the tempestuous sea, "Peace, be still!" He who did the less can do the greater: He who found bread for the body, He who stilled the outward storm, can both give himself by his Holy Spirit for the strengthening and refreshing of the soul, and say to the restless

cares, the eager longings, and the raging passions, of the inner being, "It is I; be not afraid"—"It is I; my grace is sufficient for thee"—"It is I; peace, be still!"

5. Finally, that which has comfort in it for the true Christian has also (is it not ever so?) warning and admonition for the careless and the sinful.

Do not imagine, it says to them, that the power of Christ over you is all future. Do not think only—though it be indeed worthy of all your thought—of a misery and a remorse and a torment to begin when life is ended. Already He whom you are resisting is the Lord of Nature. Already it is in Him and by his daily sustentation that you live and move and have your being. Upon his blessing or upon his curse depends already all that makes it a happiness or a misery for you to possess existence. If He gives not his benediction, food itself, light and air, rest and waking, can bring you no abiding enjoyment. These things too are his: these things, as well as the comfort and the support and the blessedness of a spiritual being. The agencies of Nature as well as of grace, of Providence as of the Spirit, are in the hands of Christ. How fearful, if you be not his—if you be not his, but his enemy!

Christ the Lord of Nature—do not those few words of themselves tell us how it is that Christian godliness has the promise of the life that is, as much as of the life to come? Is it not because a Christian can look upwards through all that he has, to a loving heart and to a loving hand in heaven? because a Christian sees in all that he here possesses, the assurance of a Saviour's love and the foretaste of an eternal inheritance? because a Christian, being the servant and the friend of a known and trusted Redeemer, can receive in that which is given an intended blessing, and recognize in all that is withholden a no less intended mark of love?

Yes, my friends, "the earth is the Lord's, and all that therein is:" and therefore they only can be at peace on earth, who are at one with its Owner. God give us all grace so to seek Him now, through the Atonement and the Propitiation, that we may know Him also as the Lord of the living and as the life of the dead!

IX.

CHRIST THE CONQUEROR OF SATAN.

"When a strong man armed keepeth his palace, his goods are in peace: but when a stronger than he shall come upon him, and overcome him, he taketh from him all his armour wherein he trusted, and divideth his spoils."—Luke xi. 21, 22.

N the original it is still more forcible. Not "a strong man," but "the strong one," in the former verse: not "a stronger than he," but "the stronger than he," in the second. In short, it is exactly, even in form and figure, the subject now before us, "Christ the Conqueror of Satan."

In opening a former topic, "Christ the Lord of Nature," we began by asking, What is Nature? Is it needful for the information of any one who reads these pages, to ask the like question now, What, or who is Satan?

We might, no doubt, have expressed the idea differently, and said, "Christ the Conqueror of Evil."

There are places, even in Scripture, where the original language leaves it ambiguous whether "evil" or "the evil one," is the right translation.

It is so in the Lord's Prayer. "Deliver us from evil," might be rendered, "Deliver us from the evil one."

It is so in our Lord's Intercession in the 17th chapter of the Gospel by St. John. "I pray not that Thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that Thou shouldest keep them from the evil." "From the evil" might be given, in like manner, "from the evil one."

And so in the 5th chapter of the 1st Epistle of St. John. "We know that we are of God, and the whole world lieth in wickedness." It might be, "lieth in the wicked one."

These are ambiguous passages. But there are others, neither few nor exceptional, in which there can be no doubt and no evasion.

That evil which is in the world—that mass of sin and corruption which is ever working around, amidst, and in every man—has a personal head,

who both embodies the principle of evil in all its malignity, and also stirs it into activity by a perpetual process of temptation.

The 3rd chapter of the Bible shows us this being, and shows him to us at work. It is he who puts to mankind the first question of disloyalty, "Yea, hath God said?" lodges in the unsuspecting heart the earliest cavil of treason; and then follows it up with the audacious defiance of unbelief, "Ye shall not surely die: for God," your tyrant, "doth know that" this which He has forbidden you is in deed and in truth your highest good. Hence "sin entered into the world, and death by sin."

In the onward course of the Old Testament Scriptures, the same fallen spirit is presented again in the various yet consistent characters of man's tempter, man's accuser, and man's tormentor.

It is he who in the 21st chapter of the 1st Book of Chronicles "stands up against Israel, provoking David to number Israel." It is he who in the Book of Job defames the righteous man, in God's presence, "as not fearing God for nought;" as reverencing God only so long as he

receives good at his hand, and ready to curse God to his face as soon as the Divine power is put forth upon him in suffering. It is he too who executes that ministry of evil by which the fidelity of God's servant is to be tried to the uttermost, and out of which he comes forth at last like gold from the refiner's furnace. It is he, finally, who in the Book of the Prophet Zechariah is seen standing, in vision, at the right hand of the Angel of the Lord—or, as it should seem from the following verse, at the right hand of the Lord God himself—to withstand the cause and to resist the work of Joshua the high priest in behalf of the chosen Jerusalem. "The Lord said unto Satan, The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan; even the Lord that hath chosen Jerusalem rebuke thee: is not this a brand plucked out of the fire?"

I need not stay to prove to any one how constant, how decisive, are the references to this fallen spirit as the mover and inciter of human evil, in the Scriptures of the New Testament. From the 4th chapter of the 1st Gospel, where he presents himself as the tempter of "the Word made flesh," down to the last chapter but two of the Book of Revelation, where he is himself finally

cast into the lake of fire, the devil, or Satan, is spoken of in every variety of application, but with an entire unity of description, as the spiritual enemy who is ever seeking man's ruin, and whom it is the one business of Divine Redemption to vanquish for the individual and at last to destroy for the race. "For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil." "That through death He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

One of the most comprehensive of the Saviour's titles is that now before us, "Christ the Conqueror of Satan."

The time is short, and we must turn aside from a thousand topics which invite enquiry.

We may notice five steps by which Christ our Lord advances to this victory over Satan.

1. The first was when He vanquished him in Himself.

"Christ was tempted in all points like as we are."

(1) Through the body. He was hungry. His long fast ended, He was conscious of a painful exhaustion. The tempter seized the moment, and

bade Him turn one of the stones of the desert into bread for himself. It sounded like a recognition of his omnipotence. It was so. "The devils also believe." It sounded like a consideration for his comfort; like the voice of a friend caring for life and health. It sounded like a regard for duty: could it be right to perish wantonly for hunger, with all the resources of Deity at command? So plausibly can the tempter argue! So difficult is it, for all save One, to discern between the seeming right and the real! But Christ discerned, and conquered. Christ would not, like the profane Esau, for one morsel of meat sell his birthright: would not so exalt the body as to humour it at the devil's bidding; at the expense of trust in God and of affiance in his protection. In its subtlest and most persuasive form He conquered that temptation which comes to us through the body.

(2) The tempter tried Him through the mind. The human nature is ambitious; loves power; desires distinction; thirsts for greatness. To such dispositions and inclinations did Satan now address himself in Christ. He offered Him universal empire. He would make the kingdoms of the world

the kingdoms of God and of his Christ without delay and without a struggle. He proposes (as it were) a short road to redemption. He will spare the Saviour all suffering: he will excuse mankind from centuries of sin and pain and conflict: all shall be Christ's at once—on one condition. He must do homage for his throne to Satan. He must hold his crown as from him. In short, it was an offer of a great good through a little evil. It was the proposal of a momentary compromise, out of which was to spring endless blessing. To save himself, and to save mankind, a deluge of blood and tears, He was to make a royal road to the destined end, not through the cross and the grave, not through the bitterness of atonement, and not through the tardiness of sanctification, but by one brief acknowledgment of an enemy's right, and by one passing homage to a usurper's crown. Christ discerned the snare and foiled the stratagem.

(3) The tempter tried Him yet again—and this time through the soul. "Thou art God's Messiah. Thou art He of whom it was written, that the Angels have thee in their keeping; that each step is guarded for thee by heavenly watchmen; that in their hands they bear thee up, lest thou so

much as strike thy foot against a stone. Now therefore claim the promise. Cast thyself down, if thou be the Son of God, from this pinnacle. God will keep thee. Thou canst not perish." It was a temptation addressed to the religious part of man. Faith itself is appealed to. "It is a want of faith to exercise prudence. Show thy trust by hardihood. If thou art God's, God will keep thee. Try Him; test the promise. In thee presumption is faith." The Saviour calmly answered Scripture by Scripture; corrected the promise by the precept; refused either to ask or to give the proposed sign from heaven; bade us, by his own example, to walk in safe ways, and not provoke God to withdraw that hand which is our one safeguard. Christ conquered Satan in the region of the spirit. He was in all points tempted like as we are—and in all without sin.

And it became Him—may we not so apply the inspired saying?—it became Him, who was to conquer Satan for mankind, to conquer him first of all in Himself. The great question of comparative strength must be decided first within. The stronger than the strong man armed must first meet him and vanquish him at home. How many

have inverted this process! have gone out in Christ's name to encounter evil in the world, without having first met and overcome it in the soul within! Hence weakness, disappointment, and defeat — falsely imputed to Christ and Christ's Gospel—really due to him who made himself into a champion of that faith which he had not first realized and embraced in the heart. That man went forth in armour which he had not proved: and therefore the evil spirit could give the old answer to the self-taught exorcists, "Jesus I know, and Paul I know; but who are ye?"

Not so did Christ. He began with the fasting and the temptation; disciplined himself first for battle; conquered Satan there, in solitude and in himself; and then was able to pass forth into other battle-fields, conquering everywhere and to conquer.

2. Secondly, then, by his works. And here we will put aside those miracles of bodily healing, in which, nevertheless, Christ taught us to recognize the same great principle, that they were all in their place dispossessions of Satan. "Ought not this woman," He said of one poor sufferer, in terms descriptive equally of all, "whom Satan hath

bound, lo, these eighteen years, be loosed from this bond on the Sabbath day?"

We will turn to those particular cases in which the devil himself was present in the struggle.

A mystery hangs over the whole subject: how should it not be so? God never speaks to gratify curiosity. Where there is no practical object in the disclosure, his Word either speaks not, or speaks in dark sayings. It is so in all matters concerning the existence of spiritual beings not human. So far as to assure us of the aid of God's ministering Angels, of their sympathy in our good, of their ministrations in time of need, so far Scripture speaks to us; but not to tell us the nature of angelic existence, in itself or in its circumstances. So far as to put us on our guard against the malignity and power of evil spirits, Scripture speaks; but not so as to tell us the history of spiritual foes —what they were, when and how they fell, or by what means they find access, in the way of temptation, to the hearts and minds of men. So then the direct conflict of Christ with Satan in the cure of persons possessed with devils, has in it, of necessity, much that we cannot understand. But are we therefore to leave it unregarded? to treat it

with suspicion? to repress its solemn lessons, both of fear and hope? God forbid. Let us gather up that which is written, and see what it says for our admonition.

It seems to be implied in every such record, that at least in the days of the Son of Man there was a sort or a degree of Satanic influence at work among men, beyond or beside that which is exemplified in all suffering, disease, and sin. Is it unreasonable to suggest that this singular type of human disease may have been permitted for the very purpose of bringing to open issue the warfare then waging between Christ and Satan? to enable men, not to infer by reasoning, but, as it were, to see with their eyes, the virulence of diabolical power and the gracious efficacy of that Omnipotence which came to counterwork it? In no other manner, we may venture to say, could the great lesson have been so decisively taught—the twofold lesson, of the extremity of man's need, and the irresistible might of a Saviour's grace.

Take the pitiable instance of the demoniac whose cure is described in the 5th chapter of St. Mark's Gospel. Every stroke of the picture is most terrible, yet most lifelike. The man has an

unclean spirit. It makes him a solitary. His dwelling is among the tombs. It makes him a maniac. He has a madman's strength and a madman's rage. It makes him a self-tormentor. The suicide's spirit is in him. He is always doing himself harm—crying and cutting himself with stones. We have called it an instance of an exceptional malady; of one belonging to other times than these. And yet how does every particular reproduce itself again now, morally in the effects of sin, mentally in the workings of madness! What is wanting is the linking together of the two in one and the same person: the sin which has developed itself into madness, and the madness which is distinctly traceable to sin.

Such was the condition, before Christ is in sight. Now mark the condition as brought face to face with Him. There is first a distinct recognition of Him: of his nature, of his power, of his right to command. Along with this, a fearful shrinking from contact with Him: "What have I to do with thee?" and a special dread of being debarred from the work of tormenting: to torment is the solace of Satan. Again, there is a glimpse of the miserable confusion, discord, and war within, arising out

of a divided personality. "My name is legion:"—the poor human being has lost its unity: every faculty, every affection, every power and energy of the soul, is in a state of warfare with every other: what a picture, this also, of the soul distracted and torn by appetite, passion, and sin! What a type of the fallen and diseased nature, by whatever name called!

And then see the strong man despoiled and ejected by the stronger. See the unclean spirits so dispossessed of their victim, that they shall even be seen to be elsewhere. See the proof of their departure, the illustration of their character, and the exhibition of their malignity, in that marvellous incident of their destructive entrance into the herd of swine: an incident full of difficulty for the sceptic, full of mystery even to the true believer, but withal so fertile in spiritual lessons, so instructive in its bearing upon the nature and tendency of all sin, so encouraging in its assurance of the separability of evil from the human being, of its merely adjunctive and circumstantial presence in us, and of Christ's absolute power to eject and exterminate it, so that it shall no longer *be* for us—that I do not scruple to call it

one of the most important and edifying of all miracles, and to claim for it a foremost place among those marvels of grace by which Christ proved himself to be "for this purpose manifested, that He might destroy the works of the devil."

Mark then, in conclusion, the condition of the same human being when Christ has wrought upon it. See the violent man calm, the madman reasonable, the suicidal hand at rest, the legion become one man in Christ Jesus. "Sitting at the feet of Jesus, clothed, and in his right mind." Hear him pray that he may remain with his benefactor and liberator, as though fearing to go back into the misery from which Christ had set him free. Hear the correcting voice saying to him, "Go home to thy friends, and tell them how great things the Lord hath done for thee, and hath had compassion on thee!"

If these pages shall fall into the hand of any one whom Satan hath bound, perhaps for long years, with the chain of sin—with the band of some inveterate evil habit or sinful lust—let him read in this history the prescription for his malady and the assurance of his cure! Let him come in heart, by prayer, to Jesus—reminding Him of that which He

did upon earth for this demoniac; and let him know this, on the word which cannot lie, that all power is given to Him in heaven as on earth—that He is the Conqueror of Satan still, as once by miracle, so now by grace!

3. Christ is the Conqueror of Satan by his death.

"It shall bruise thy head," said the original prophecy, "and thou shalt bruise his heel." The promised seed of the woman should bruise the serpent's head in the very act of the serpent bruising his heel. It was "through death," says the Epistle to the Hebrews, that Christ "destroyed him that had the power of death, that is, the devil." "Now is the judgment of this world," said the Lord himself, in the immediate foreview of his Passion; "now shall the prince of this world be cast out. And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me." It was the death of Christ which cast out Satan. It was through death that He destroyed the devil. It was in submitting to the bruising of the heel, that He himself struck the mortal blow upon the head of "the old serpent, called the devil and Satan."

How true! how touching a thought! Yes, it was by his death, even more than by his tempta-

tion, even more than by his miracles, that Christ conquered the devil.

How was this?

Can any one ask who knows anything of himself, or anything of Christ?

Was it not by submitting to death as the sacrifice and propitiation for sin, that Christ redeemed us? Was it not by being "made sin for us?" by being "wounded for our transgressions" and "bruised for our iniquities?" We thank God, every day, for his "inestimable love in the redemption of the world by our Lord Jesus Christ." Is there no meaning in those words? Or is it only a vague hope which we thus express, for a future deliverance? or else a thanksgiving for a limited number, interested (where others are not interested) in the Saviour's cross?

We do not thus read the language of Holy Scripture, nor the language of the Church's words of worship.

We believe that the Cross and Passion of our Saviour Christ was the means of a real and actual redemption, and that for all the world. We believe that that death did avail as an atonement for all sin of all men; that it removed that obstacle of unforgiven and uncancelled guilt which was the

very strength of Satan's kingdom; that void between man and God which was the real and actual impediment between the soul of man and the glorious liberty of the children of God. And therefore we can never consent to speak of Satan's kingdom as unaffected by that great transaction; that death of the Son of God in human form, to take away the curse and the debt of sin, and to buy back the world for holiness and for happiness and for God.

We mourn indeed, and well may we mourn, over the comparatively small effects which the Gospel has as yet wrought upon the souls and lives of men. We point with sad misgivings to vast regions of earth still unblessed with the very knowledge of the Saviour: and we feel with shame and self-reproach that even Christendom is but faintly influenced, but superficially penetrated, by the light of Christ and of the Spirit. We find in ourselves a coldness and a reluctance and an inconsistency in reference to Christ's work and to Christ's will, which humbles us in the dust while we give thanks for his redemption. Yet none the less do we maintain, for his honour and for that of God who gave Him, that the power of Satan has been shaken by the re-

demption; that the world, at its worst, is not quite in the state in which it was in days of heathen darkness; that the kingdom of the devil is both contracted in its limits, and weakened in its dominion; and that preparations are visibly making for that day when the Son of Man shall send forth his angels, and shall gather out of his earth all things that offend.

4. And so this brings us to speak of the victory of Christ over Satan achieved by his life. And when we now speak of his life, it is not of his life on earth, but of his life after death in heaven; that life upon which He entered by resurrection, and to which the seal was finally set by his ascension into God's presence.

We have spoken of the conquest by death: now the life is the fruit of that death: according to his own saying, in a passage already referred to, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, Except a corn of wheat fall into the ground and die, it abideth alone: but if it die, it bringeth forth much fruit." The life after death is that of which He said to his disciples, "Because I live, ye shall live also." The death had in it the seed and the promise and the firstfruit of victory: but the life after death is that which reaps the harvest.

Is it not so?

The power of Satan is a power exercised over hearts poisoned and lives ruined. If that power is to be broken, not in name but in truth, it must be broken in the heart, broken in the life, which Satan hath bound.

And what is it which alone can break that power in the heart and in the life of man?

What but the Holy Spirit of God, given as the purchase of redemption—given to the individual—given in answer to prayer awakened and aroused by the message of the Gospel; by the Gospel which says first, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved;" by the Gospel which says secondly, "God will give his Holy Spirit to them that ask Him?"

Now therefore it is the life of Christ in heaven which makes Him in this particular sense the Conqueror of Satan.

Whenever one of us, wearied and grieved with the burden of his sins, comes to Christ for salvation; whenever one of us, feeling the yoke upon him of some inveterate evil habit, wicked temper, or deadly lust, kneels down seriously and humbly before God, and asks Him for Jesus Christ's sake to forgive and to cleanse him; to pardon all that is

past, and to send into his heart that Holy Spirit who is all liberty and love and peace and strength; and when in answer to this prayer—as will be the case if he only prays on and faints not—he is set free; gradually, tardily it may be, but really, decisively, and at last completely; then does Christ conquer Satan: then is the saying again verified, which He spake once on earth, "I beheld Satan as lightning fall from heaven;" the saying which He wrote afterwards from his glory, by his Apostle and Evangelist St. John, "There was war in heaven: Michael and his Angels fought against the dragon; and the dragon fought, and his angels, and prevailed not, neither was their place found any more in heaven."

My friends, it is in our power—it is in the power of each one who reads these sayings—to multiply and to extend this conquest of Christ. Look into your own hearts; find out there anything which defileth: drag to the light of conscience any bad disposition, any sinful desire, any indulged or half-indulged lust: and then ask of God, through Jesus Christ, to give you his Holy Spirit to mortify and to extirpate it: and you too, like thousands and tens of thousands before you, shall experience

that of which this subject tells, when it describes our Lord Jesus Christ as the Conqueror of Satan in this fourth and most practical sense of all, by his life after death, by his life now in heaven, at the right hand of God. The last-mentioned was a victory wide as the world: this is a victory minute and searching as the very personal life of the individual soul.

5. And now, finally, there is yet one more way in which the words before us are verified.

Christ the Conqueror of Satan in Himself.

Christ the Conqueror of Satan by his works.

Christ the Conqueror of Satan by his death.

Christ the Conqueror of Satan by his life after death.

Now, fifthly and lastly, Christ the Conqueror of Satan by his future judgment.

The revelation is half disclosed to us in many places of Scripture.

We read in the 25th chapter of St. Matthew's Gospel, of an "everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels."

We read in the 1st Epistle to the Corinthians, "Know ye not that we shall judge angels?"

We read in the 2nd Epistle of St. Peter, that

"God spared not the angels that sinned, but cast them down to hell, and delivered them into chains of darkness, to be reserved unto judgment."

And in St. Jude's Epistle, in like manner, "The angels which kept not their first estate, but left their own habitation, He hath reserved in everlasting chains under darkness unto the judgment of the great day."

These are hints of the things spoken of. But St. John, in the 20th chapter of the Book of Revelation, sets the very thing itself before us in all its fearful grandeur.

He has spoken of that binding of Satan for a thousand years, which we believe to have been the immediate effect of our Lord's death, resurrection, ascension, and Pentecostal gift. The "binding" there spoken of is the "falling from heaven" of the Gospels, the "casting out of heaven" of the 12th chapter of the Book of Revelation, the "delivering into chains of darkness" of St. Peter, the "reserving in everlasting chains under darkness" of St. Jude.

That season of limited power, figured by the binding, has now run its course. "The thousand years are expired." Satan is loosed out of his pri-

son. A brief period (the theme of many prophecies) of more unbridled licence, is to be granted to him in the near prospect of the last end of all. He goes out to deceive the nations. Gog and Magog are to be gathered to one last battle with the saints of God. They go up on the breadth of the earth, and compass the camp of the saints about, and the beloved city. In the very moment of their seeming triumph, fire comes down from God out of heaven, and devours them. The last onslaught of infidelity and wickedness has had its chance and lost it. Now all is ready for the consummation of all things. Then at last the devil that deceived them is cast into the lake of fire and brimstone, and shall be tormented day and night for ever and ever. Then is set the great white throne: earth and heaven flee from the face of Him that sits thereon: the dead, small and great, stand before God: the books are opened; and another book is opened, which is the book of life.

Christ the long despised and treated with scorn —Christ seen at length as King of kings and Lord of lords—is the Conqueror of Satan at last by judgment.

"Alas! who shall live when God doeth this?"

X.

CHRIST THE DESTROYER OF DEATH.

"Our Saviour Jesus Christ hath abolished death." — 2 Tim. i. 10.

"ABOLISHED death?"

Have we not, then, all to die?

Yes, certainly that end is before all the living. Death, or its equivalent—death, for all generations save one; its equivalent, a change equal to death, for that one generation which shall be alive at Christ's Advent—this is our portion, this our prospect: nothing which Christ has done has interfered with the working of that one universal rule of the Adam being, "It is appointed unto men once to die."

And what is death? Who shall tell us what death is?

We know how to define it: as the dissolution of soul and body; the snapping in twain of the two-fold cord, the material body and the immaterial soul, which is our link to the living; the departure of that soul, the presence of which is life, from the house of this tabernacle, and the drooping down of the dead weight of the body upon the earth from which it was taken.

And we can say even more of the circumstances of death. We can tell of the gradual or the more sudden approach of that last enemy; of his coming as we have seen it in a decay of strength, a contraction of the daily walk, first within the four walls, then to the chamber, then to the bed, at last to the coffin; and (what is even worse) a slow but perceptible numbing of the faculties, enfeebling of the memory and reason, narrowing of the range of thought, and confining of the flight of mind, till at last we begin to say, What will be left for eternity and heaven?—or else of his coming as we have seen it in youth or middle age, through infection, through fever, through accident, through sin—when reason has been upset on her throne, or held down trembling upon it (according to that wonderful saying) by a frenzy seated beside her; or else, it

may be, has simply slumbered, drugged by disease or by its remedies, and has so passed away, without word or sign to tell whither the man was going, or whether indeed any whither: — these things we have seen, and we have thought perhaps that we saw death in seeing them, when in reality they were all but circumstances and accidents of the very thing itself, and we turned from that death-bed, or came back from that grave, just as ignorant of the essential nature of that mighty change which is before each one of us, as if indeed we had heard nothing, seen nothing, and felt nothing.

And yet, I say, this change, this mysterious, unknown, secret change, which we call death—which we define, and of which we daily see the circumstances and the consequences—this change is before each one of us. In some way, at some time, we must all, we must each, die.

This prospect affects different men very differently.

Some men are reckless of it. They not only forget, they even despise it. They not only do many things which they would not do if they expected it; they not only trifle with health of mind and body; they not only wanton with sin, and

brave consequences, and defy judgment, but they even, in the boldness of a constitutional hardihood, will risk life itself, or give away life itself, without a fear of the thing called dying, and without an apprehension of that "undiscovered country" which they know lies just beyond it.

Other men are but too mindful of it, if that can be. They are timid about infection; they tremble at the first touch of illness; they shrink from the mention of disease; they will leave any symptom unexplored and untraced within them, rather than incur the possibility that the physician may look grave over the indication, and hint the existence of that malady which is to ring the knell of life.

On the whole, an Apostle teaches us that the fear of death is a predominant feeling in man's nature. He says that Christ came to "deliver those who through fear of death were all their lifetime subject to bondage." It is natural to fear death. Death is one of those real dangers which lose not, but rather gain, by a close and thoughtful inspection. It is a very serious matter, that within seventy years at the furthest, all but one or two of my readers will be in their graves, unless they shall

have risen. It is a solemn thought that, more surely than that any one of us will lie down to sleep to-night, or rise from sleep to-morrow, each one of us will have to pass through, separately and alone, that act of dying, and that state of death, of which there is no one to tell us either the nature or the consequences. No one comes back from death to enlighten us as to its essence : and if such a return were ordained for any, he could not make us understand ; he could not put us, in imagination or in knowledge, in the place which each one must occupy some day by actual experience. Such a prospect is serious: only a fool can despise it. The fear of death is the natural feeling ; and from that fear grows (the Apostle says) bondage. A man feels himself a slave. Here is a necessity which he cannot evade. Here is a thing to be borne, and a state to be entered, which he can neither avoid by skill, nor refuse by resolution, nor even know beforehand by any study, any philosophy, or any devotion. A man who is liable to this cannot be called free. Through fear of death he is all his lifetime subject to bondage.

In discoursing, from time to time, upon various attributes and titles of our Lord Jesus Christ, we

could not fail to select this as one of the most distinctive,

CHRIST THE DESTROYER OF DEATH.

Our Saviour Jesus Christ, the text says, hath abolished death : hath abolished this great enemy, this stern tyrant, this universal devourer of man : abolished him—and yet, we say, he is : he is before each one of us, and none of us can escape him.

How is this? What is that destruction, or abolition, of Death, which Christ has made, or shall make, for us?

1. The context leads us to say, first, that Christ is the Destroyer of Death by his Word. "Who hath abolished death, and hath brought life and immortality to light through the Gospel."

We hardly consider how dark the grave must have been before Christ came.

I know that a few of the ancient philosophers thought out by reasoning, and taught as a dogma of their science, the truth of a life after death. It was a noble triumph of the unassisted reason. That man should have thus argued out, by pure philosophy, the tenet of his own immortality, seems to say to us, That Scripture must indeed be true,

which tells us that God created man in his own image, after his own likeness; the image of his intelligence, the likeness of his reason, and of his foresight, and of his reflection.

And yet, if we read one of those writings in which the immortality of the soul is argued out by the greatest of Greek philosophers, I think we shall say that his argument could convince no one—could scarcely have convinced himself. Inaccessible by its subtlety to the common multitude, it must have been unsatisfactory by its fancifulness to the privileged few. It was a sound conclusion from unsound premises. It could scarcely be dignified with a higher praise than this, that it was "one guess amongst many" of the highest philosophy of Greece. Woe to the man who has to lean his whole weight for eternity upon such a basis! If instinct does not teach immortality, we shall look in vain for it in philosophy.

And even in the Scriptures of the Old Testament, a life after death can scarcely be said to be made the subject of express revelation. I know that there are passages, neither few nor doubtful, which imply it: hopes expressed by righteous men, for themselves, of a life with God hereafter; and

intimations in the Prophets of an immortality for man, chiefly in the form of similitudes applied to the resuscitation of nations. Our Lord Jesus Christ himself teaches us to look for these things in the Old Testament, and finds them for us in places where they might have escaped our research.

But I will venture to say this—that there is no such thing in the Old Testament Scriptures (till Gospel light is thrown upon them) as an abolition of death and a bringing of life and immortality to light.

It was reserved for Jesus Christ to destroy death first of all by his Word.

Need I remind any one of the clearness and the fulness with which He makes a life beyond death the subject of express revelation? "Verily, verily, I say unto you, The hour is coming, and now is, when the dead shall hear the voice of the Son of God; and they that hear shall live." "The hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, and shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation." "This is the will of Him that sent me, that every one which seeth the Son, and

believeth on Him, may have everlasting life, and I will raise him up at the last day." "I am the Resurrection and the Life: he that believeth in me, though he were dead (though he have died), yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth in me shall never die." "I go to prepare a place for you: and if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and receive you unto myself, that where I am there ye may be also." "Father, I will that they also whom Thou hast given me be with me where I am: that they may behold my glory which Thou hast given me, for Thou lovedst me before the foundation of the world."

Thus Jesus Christ destroys death by his Word. To those who have learned to trust Him—to those who believe that He came forth from God with a message of truth and reality for man—his word is enough: enough for faith, enough for conviction, enough for hope. He brings life and immortality to light by his Gospel.

2. And yet, so great is the danger, so terrible the foe, so critical the question therefore for each one of us, that it has pleased Him to add something to the bare word, "that by two immutable things

we might have a strong consolation, who have fled for refuge to the hope set before us."

He destroyed death, secondly, by his works done below.

On three separate occasions — reserving one greater still and more decisive—Jesus Christ came face to face, and entered into a combat, as it were, hand to hand with death.

He had just returned from a memorable conflict with a legion of possessing devils, and was come again to that side of the sea of Galilee on which most of his mighty works were done, when there came one of the rulers of a Jewish synagogue, and with every mark of respect and reverence besought Him to come and lay his healing hand upon an already dying child. It was in some respects a new request. Disease many times —but death once only before, and in a different region—had come under his restoring touch. In the first instance, it should seem, the word was "dying," not "dead." "My little daughter lieth at the point of death." But soon (if so) the message follows him, that she whom he had left dying was already dead. "Why troublest thou the Master any further?" was the unbelieving or but

half-believing comment. Sickness He might have dealt with: but the last enemy of all is too strong even for Him. Yet the encouraging word of the Saviour emboldens him to hope even against hope. "Be not afraid," He said, "only believe." Hindered by many interruptions on his way, at last He reaches the house. And there, on the threshold, He rids himself of the throng of followers, takes with Him just three witnesses from among the twelve Apostles, and then presents himself upon the scene of mourning. Reproving the extravagant grief, always unseemly and in this case needless, He enters the chamber of death, with only the parents and the chosen three, and in words brief and commanding—of which St. Mark has preserved to us the actual sound as they fell from his sacred lips—He bids the dead child arise. Life comes back, and health with it: He who here gave, gives ever liberally and upbraids not: as in the miracle at Cana, a vast superabundance of wine—and as, in the miracle of the Desert, twelve superfluous baskets full of bread—so here, not a feeble spark of life, to be fanned by studious watching into the full glow of health; but life, and vigour, and appetite, all in one—"her spirit came again"—"straight-

way she arose and walked"—"and He commanded to give her meat."

Thus our Lord called back, by the word of his power, a soul newly parted, to inhabit again for a lifetime the tabernacle of the body.

But his hand is not limited by moments, nor arrested by the lapse of hours. As He recalls the child's soul from its recent flight, so at another time He revives the corpse in its burial, and at another opens the sealed tomb, and stays corruption itself in its visible course.

Approaching, one day, in his journeyings, the little town of Nain, He perceives, issuing from its gate, a funeral procession. Crowd meets crowd; "much people," the Evangelist says, "went with Him," and "much people" followed the dead man to his burial. It was a case for compassion. It was a young man's funeral; and he had left behind him a widowed mother, now childless too. That sorrow which awakened the sympathy of all, could not lack the sympathy of the Man of Sorrows: and so we read that, when the Lord saw her, He had compassion on her, and said to her, "Weep not"—and then put his hand upon the bier on which the dead was laid, and, stopping the

bearers, addressed to the lifeless corpse itself the word of authority, "Young man, I say unto thee, Arise." That word was not spoken in vain. The word of authority was also the communication of power: "He that was dead sat up, and began to speak: and He delivered him to his mother."

There is yet a third record; if it be possible, more marvellous still.

There was one family upon earth, upon which Jesus bestowed more than common love, and in which He oftentimes found refreshment from the contradiction of sinners and the strife of tongues. A brother and two sisters were its surviving members; and for each of them, the sacred history tells, Jesus had a peculiar and a sacred bond of love. At length, during his absence in a distant part of Palestine, sickness enters the home. The brother lies in danger: and the first thought of the distressed sisters is of that absent Friend in whose power and tenderness they have long learned to confide. They send to Him, saying, "Lord, behold, he whom Thou lovest is sick." But, instead of hastening to their assistance, He remained for two days in the place where He was. At last He

proposed to his disciples a journey into Judæa; speaking of his friend in Bethany as already "sleeping," and of his purpose to go and "awaken" him. He had suffered the sickness to run on into death, that so the glory of God might be shown forth in the rising. Meanwhile his delay had seemed to the sorrowing sisters hard and unlike Him. If He had been there, they said, He could have prevented death: the thought of a resurrection was still above and beyond them. Each sister, according to her character, gave utterance to the regret almost in reproach: and Jesus himself was profoundly moved as He looked upon the grief for which He had judged it right to leave room. But there was that in his heart, which, though it stopped not his sympathy, yet gave authority to his consolation. "Thy brother shall rise again." "If thou canst believe, thou shalt see the glory of God." He approached the grave. A stone lay at the cave's mouth. He bade them disclose the place of the dead: and then, after one brief thanksgiving, for the omnipotent strength of which He was conscious—for that "very present" help which He felt to be with Him for the mighty work which He had in hand

—He calls forth the dead man from the inmost tomb, and sees the call answered by the instant return of his friend from the world of spirit to the world of sense.

A doubtful blessing for the man! to be recalled from his rest, to taste death twice over! to come back to a world of trouble and sorrow from the Paradise of the just made perfect! but yet an exchange needful for the confirmation of his Master's work, and a sacrifice cheerfully borne for his sake who demanded it.

3. Thirdly, Christ was the Destroyer of Death by his death.

The oft-quoted prophecy of the day of the Fall, "It" (the seed of the woman) "shall bruise thy head"—the head of the serpent—"and thou shalt bruise his heel"—had thus a fulfilment yet more condensed and concentrated than the words promised: for it was in the bruising of the heel that the bruising of the head was accomplished. "That through death," says the Apostle to the Hebrews, "He might destroy him that had the power of death, that is, the devil."

I know that there might have been a death of the Saviour, which would have had no such virtue.

If Christ had died and not risen, then would the victory at last have rested with his foe. A dead Saviour is none. A Redeemer holden permanently by death would have been powerless even to redeem himself.

But this, St. Peter says, "was not possible."

Why not possible?

Because it would have gone against the plain word and promise of God.

God "loosed" for Him "the pains of death, because it was not possible that He should be holden of it: *for* David speaketh concerning Him, Thou wilt not leave my soul in hell."

Therefore, when I say that Christ destroyed death by his death, I mean by that particular death which He died; a death for sin, and a death unto resurrection.

We have spoken of Christ destroying death by his Word; by the plain predictions of his Gospel, which everywhere implies and everywhere expresses the certainty of a life to come.

But O, my friends, is that enough to destroy death? merely to believe in an immortality?

Christ's word tells of a resurrection of life: but the same word speaks also of a resurrection of damnation.

Therefore you see—and even the more for Christ's Gospel—there may remain for the sinner a dread of death. Death is not destroyed by merely telling us, on the surest evidence, of an immortality: for an immortality may be of two kinds; an immortality of joy, or an immortality of sorrow; an immortality of life, or an immortality of punishment.

Now therefore we see why Christ's death should be added to Christ's word, as the destroyer of death.

It is something, no doubt, that in this fearful future which lies before each of us, Christ should have gone before; Christ should have even known and passed through the state of death. O, it makes the grave more tolerable, and Hades more homelike, and the cheerless comfortless separation of soul and body less desolate and less terrible, to know that Christ has been there before; to have a Friend come back from all to tell us, I have endured; to say, I know the worst, and it can be borne; I have gone through all, and in it all my rod and my staff shall comfort thee!

But even this is not enough.

Christ's death had in it something different from

the mere handselling of a strange thing for those that should come after; something more than the mere feeling that a friend has borne this operation before me, or passed in the van through that enemy's gate, through which I in the rear must faintly struggle after Him.

What is it that makes death formidable? formidable in a sense beyond its mere strangeness, and beyond the mere pain, the physical pain, of its endurance?

Is it not sin?

"The sting of death is sin."

Now then, if the sting is taken out of death, its wound will be harmless: it will be like that which we have just called it—an operation; something sharp, no doubt, and painful; but only medicinal in its intent, and only remedial in its consequence.

That is what will indeed destroy death; if it loses its sting; if it becomes a thing which must be submitted to as a pain, but which is not the beginning of an insufferable wretchedness.

Death is the curse of sin. Natural death came into the world by sin.

But natural death is chiefly dreadful as the com-

pletion of spiritual death, and as the vestibule of the second death, which is death eternal.

If then Christ has taken away our guilt; has borne our sins, has made an atonement for iniquity; has procured for us pardon from God, and love, and blessing, and eternal life; and this by his own obedience unto death: then the words are fulfilled which say that Christ is the Destroyer of Death by his death; by that death from which indeed He rose, but by that death wherein and whereby He bore and took away the sin of the world.

Yes, we may go down securely into the dark valley, may we but feel that our sins have been done away first; that God, for Jesus Christ's sake, has forgiven us all trespasses.

And thus our Lord Jesus Christ has been the destroyer of death already, in ten thousand times ten thousand instances.

Every Christian's death has been such a victory.

Every person who is enabled to face death manfully, through faith in Him who has died, is an example of that triumph over death which through death Christ gained.

You have seen such deaths, Christian friends, or you have read of them: and have they not made you feel that there was a reality in the Gospel? let me rather say, a reality in Him of whom the Word of God tells as having abolished death and brought life and immortality to light through his Gospel?

4. I have yet a fourth word to add: Christ destroys death finally by the great resurrection.

The words are St. Paul's. "The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death." And he tells us how. Even by that resurrection of the body, which can alone give to the *whole* of man victory over the grave, and over death and hell.

How often shall we repeat this evident maxim, that a disembodied soul is but half a man?

Our Lord so much assumes this, that He argues from a passage in the Old Testamant, which speaks of God as the God of Abraham, and the God of Isaac, and the God of Jacob, that Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob must not only be living still as souls, but must be destined to a resurrection of the body. The whole argument turns upon this. Man is soul and body. If there is to be a future life of man,

it must be a life complete in both parts: a soul by itself is a ghost, and not a man.

True, St. Paul says the body that shall rise is of a different mould and making from the body that died.

He exhausts all similitudes in showing the possible variety and divergence of bodies; how manifold are the discrepancies, even in matter, between body and body; and yet how truly each is a body, and how gloriously the resurrection body shall fulfil the aspirations and repair the deficiencies of the body of our humanity and our mortality.

Not, then, until the morning of Christ's Advent will Death, the last enemy, be destroyed. Abolished by Christ's Gospel, in hope and faith; abolished by Christ's work below, in principle and in promise; abolished by Christ's death for sin, in virtue and power; Death shall not be abolished (it is the same word) in act and in deed, until the dead shall be raised incorruptible, and we, the then living, shall be changed into the same image.

Great and magnificent is the glimpse thus given of the powers and employments of the life that shall be revealed.

Not for purposes of dreamy contemplation or

indolent praise shall we be clad, in the great day of the Lord, with bodies of beauty and glory.

Work too there will be for us: work, large and lofty, expansive and satisfying: work without weariness or inconstancy: work, all from God, and for God, and in God.

Angelic functions, and more than angelic, may then be entrusted to us: for "they that shall be counted worthy to obtain that world and the resurrection from the dead are equal unto the Angels:" they can know thenceforth no pain, nor sorrow, nor weariness, nor infirmity, nor self-reproach: for the body of humiliation is changed into the likeness of His body of glory—they shall be like Him, for they shall see Him as He is. They too, like his holy Angels, shall then "excel in strength:" they, like his holy Angels now, shall then with new energy "do his commandments, hearkening" with open ear "to the voice of his words."

Therefore our latest thoughts must pass on into the region of faith, and see Death himself cast into the lake of fire, and his work finally defeated and undone by a transformation which shall make the powers of evil wish that they had left man alone in

Creation gifts. So far is the Paradise Lost outshone and transcended by the Paradise Regained!

Christian friends! what shall be our part and lot in this abolition and destruction of the last enemy of man?

The question is answered by another question. What is our part now in that destruction of death which Christ our Saviour wrought by his own death?

Have we brought our sins to Him to be blotted out? Have we claimed our share in that forgiveness of sins which He purchased for us with his own blood?

If not, we are still (in our inmost souls) subject to that bondage which is the consequence of the fear of death. We cannot look forward into that mysterious region which lies within the black gate, without a serious misgiving as to the consequences — say, even the *possible* consequences — of the things done in the body; of evil done, and good left undone; of man disregarded or injured, of God forgotten, despised, and sinned against.

But, if we are Christ's; if, that is, we have seriously come to Him for pardon, and seriously devoted ourselves to Him for grace: then we are

sharers in his victory over death and the grave, and when his glory shall be revealed, we shall be glad also with exceeding joy.

God give us all a place in that blessed home, of which it is written, "The former things are passed away;" and, "There shall be no more death!"

XI.

CHRIST THE SINNER'S FRIEND.

"A friend of publicans and sinners."—Matt. xi. 19.

THE words were spoken in reproach. It was an enemy who said this.

But, like many other words meant as reproach—like the inscription upon the Cross itself, meant in mockery, but hereafter (God grant it) to be verified in glory—this designation has come to be an honour: and we all count it a privilege and a happiness to be able to gaze upon this title, as one of the brightest jewels of our Saviour's crown—

CHRIST THE SINNER'S FRIEND.

Who is a sinner? and what is it to be the friend of a sinner? and how is Christ shown and proved to be such? These are some of the questions

which we must seek to answer, if we would speak aright or meditate profitably on this inspiring theme.

"All have sinned."

Yes, the infection of sin is in all, and the working of sin is in all, and the manifestation of sin has been in all, and the guilt and condemnation of sin is upon all. There is no one of us who is not a sinner—or who, as being such, does not need a friend.

But some are worse sinners than others. There is a difference in heinousness between one kind or form of sin and another. No code, divine or human—save, perhaps, one of which a half-fabulous tradition tells—ever professed to make all sins or all sinners equal.

One man sins against light, against education, against conviction, against warnings and mercies and renewed trials innumerable; sins, and sins again, and will sin—persists in his sin, and loves his sin—till at last he drags down upon himself ruin, almost no one pitying. And another man sins more than half in ignorance; has been so reared and so nurtured in the very haunts and homes of vice, that it would indeed have been a

prodigy and a miracle if he had not fallen: and when he is brought to account for crimes which he cannot gainsay, every thoughtful man, and every humane man, and every Christian man, not only laments the issue, but exculpates the poor transgressor from more than half the criminality of his sin. And a third man is not, in these senses, a transgressor at all: he has been kept all his life from gross stains of sin: early instruction, a good disposition, a careful training, excellent examples, a Christian home, have had their due, their natural influence: he has learned to bridle appetite, to say No to inclination, to rouse himself to duty, to struggle (not unsuccessfully) after usefulness and honour: and though the Adam leaven is in him, and though he has his faults, and though in the sight of God he is a sinner still, and though when he stands before God in judgment he will want a better plea than his respectability or his innocence, yet it would be false and therefore mischievous doctrine, to confound him in one sweeping charge with the former, or to overlook the clear line of visible demarcation which severs him from even the better of the two classes earlier spoken of.

All have sinned: but there are degrees, and there are kinds, and there are complexions and characteristics of sin.

Then of which kind of sinner do we now speak?

Of each kind, and of all kinds, Christian readers, which can value a Saviour.

We leave out none, when we call Christ the sinner's Friend.

And yet, alas! some will leave themselves out.

I mean that there are some who do not enough feel their own sinfulness to care for a Divine, an Almighty, and an All-merciful Friend.

They will see what they are—what they are at the best—some day: they will see it in some cloudy and dark hour of distress and sorrow: they will see it in some moment of humiliation which they look not for and reckon not: they will see it probably in the hour of death: they will see it, if not sooner, in the great day of judgment:—but at present they see it not. In a general way they are willing to call themselves sinners even now; but sin has not found them out: they know not as yet "the plague of their own heart."

And therefore, practically, the subject of this

reading will have no charm for them. They are sinners, and Christ is the sinner's Friend; but at present they will let Him be so for others, and they will not come themselves to ask that that sacred, that saving relationship, may be established and cemented and realized for them. "Ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."

Man excludes them not: and certainly God excludes them not. O, let them not ignorantly or wilfully exclude themselves!

Now what is it to be a sinner's friend?

It is not difficult for a sinner to find a friend (so called) who will sin with him; who will show him new ways of sinning; who will encourage him in forgetting duty; or even (though this be less common) who will pity him and stand by him when sin has brought forth sorrow.

And it is not difficult, on the other hand, for a sinner to find a friend (so called) who will give him good advice; look down upon him with commiseration from a pinnacle of self-righteous virtue; or even point him with cold direction towards the gate of self-denial and the opening path of virtue.

But neither the one nor the other of these is the friend of whom we are in quest.

The one loves the sin, and the other loves not the sinner.

Now therefore, instead of pursuing the question in a dry abstract way, let us bring in at once the main part of our subject, and show, God helping us, what sort of friend Christ is to sinners; how Christ showed and proved himself to be, in deed and in truth, the sinner's Friend.

1. He showed it, first of all, by the very object and purpose of his coming.

"Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners."

I separate this from the effect of his coming. The endeavour is the first thing.

If a man throws himself into the cold river at mid-winter to rescue a drowning woman, we honour the attempt: we say, whether he succeeds or fails, That man has a feeling heart: and if he fails, if he gives his life in vain, if both sink, we say, He did what he could—he gave his all. We separate easily and justly between the endeavour and the result.

Now therefore I say first of all that, when Jesus

Christ came into the world in the hope and for the purpose of saving sinners, He showed himself the sinner's Friend. If He even failed in saving—if He even mistook the way—the heart of friendship and of love was in the effort, and you should love Him for having tried to save. That was why He left Heaven. That was why He consented to forego for three-and-thirty comfortless and suffering years his original glory. That was why He came to be born of a woman, and to taste all the privations, and all the lonelinesses, and all the desertions, and all the pains, which make up the total sum of earth's sufferings and of sin's penalties.

2. He showed himself the Friend of sinners by the words which He spoke below.

The most impressive and the most memorable of his Parables are of this special character: they were addressed to sinners, and they breathed a spirit of tenderness, a spirit of encouragement, and a spirit of love, towards those whom common men look down upon as sunk below redemption.

There is one Gospel which treasures up a multitude of these sayings.

The 15th and 18th chapters of St. Luke are a storehouse of such comfort.

The parable of the Lost Sheep—the parable of the Lost Piece of Money—the parable of the Prodigal Son—the parable of the Pharisee and the Publican—are all examples of the way in which Jesus Christ dealt with sinners.

And what do these say?

(1) A man has an hundred sheep. One strays from the flock. Over pathless wilds, along bleak mountain sides, the ignorant straggler pursues his wandering: frightened, disconsolate, wretched, yet powerless to find or to retrace its way.

How does the owner argue?

Does he say, I have ninety and nine left to me—let this foolish wanderer go? I will not waste time and strength, I will not endanger those that remain, in the endeavour to catch and to bring home just this one?

Not so.

He leaves the ninety and nine; leaves them anywhere—"in the wilderness," our Lord says; and for the time lives only in the one lost; tracks it by skilful thought, follows it with long patience; and if he succeeds—if he overtakes,

if he recovers it—he thinks more of it, for the time, than of all the rest together; calls his friends to rejoice with him, and regards it with the twofold joy, of one who receives a gift, and of one who gains a prize.

So is it in Heaven, Christ adds in the moral of the parable, when one sinner comes to repentance. There is joy there, more jubilant and more transporting, over the one sinner repenting, than over the ninety and nine just persons who need no repentance.

(2) A woman has ten pieces of silver: the careful savings, perhaps, of forethought and self-denial, for the payment of a half-year's rent, or the purchase of a year's clothing. One of these ten is missing. All the care and all the economy of months are thus defeated and disappointed. The rent will be short of its amount by one tenth part: the purchase contemplated will be maimed and spoilt by this unexpected misfortune. What can be done? Does she comfort herself by thinking that it is but one out of ten—that nine pieces remain? Does she resign herself to the loss, and beseech her landlord to accept the nine for the ten? Nay, she refuses to acquiesce in aught less

than the recovery of the missing coin: she waits not even for the dawn, but by night lights her candle, and sweeps the house, and seeks diligently till she find it: and then, in the joy of that success, she calls together her friends and neighbours, and bids them to rejoice with her, because she has found the piece which she had lost.

O what a parable for sinful men! How meet an utterance for the sinner's Friend! How apt a correction of that common and most natural feeling, God cannot care for the loss of such a one as I am—a mere insignificant atom in his vast universe—a being spoilt by sin, and unworthy of the least of his regard, who is the Lord of sinless Angels and righteous men!

(3) An undutiful and unloving son asks of his father the present possession of that which shall be his own. He would escape from home: he would find for himself more congenial company, and enjoy a licence of irregular living which cannot be his under a father's eye. The request is granted. He takes with him the gifts of his father's bounty, and goes to squander them in sin and riot in a far country. Presently comes a famine—a famine without—a famine too within. He feels in his

heart and in his soul the griping hand of want. He sinks to the lowest and vilest offices: to feed swine, to share the swine's husks, this is now the ambition of him who once lived in a house of plenty, and knew not, but by name, the very existence of poverty. At last he bethinks himself of a return. In his father's house the hirelings have abundance: he will go, and petition for a place amongst them: lost as a son, he will return a servant. How is he greeted? Needs it long supplication, many entreaties, and bitter tears to move his father's heart to softness? Nay, before he speaks, he is answered; "while he was yet a great way off, his father met him," and the announcement of the prodigal's return is the signal for merriment and dancing.

When was this Parable, like the two former Parables, spoken? Was it not on the very occasion of a murmuring against Christ, on the part of the Pharisees and Scribes, that He was the sinner's Friend? "This man receiveth sinners, and eateth with them!" Yes: then this young man is the sinner, and God is the Father: and the young man has taken his Father's gifts, and treated them as if they were twice his own—his own to use, his

own to abuse: and he has escaped from the Father's home, and thought to live happily by himself, without God in the world: and he has tried the experiment, and found that there is, after all, something in man's heart which wants and cries out for and will not be satisfied without God: he has found that the pleasures of sin are always bitter in the retrospect, and at last become torments in the very using: and so he has bethought himself, in the land of his misery and of his exile, of a love never-failing and unexhausted: he has risen and returned, and re-sought his spurned and outraged home: and God, his Father, instead of reproaching him, has met him half way, and interrupted his confessions by the voice of fatherly forgiveness—has taken him in, and made him a feast, and counts that a day of joy and gladness which has brought back, however soiled and scarred, a living soul from the grasp of hell and death.

It is, again, the very utterance of the sinner's Friend.

(4) Two men have gone up at the hour of prayer into the Temple-courts. And one presses forward, and stands forth for all to see, and speaks aloud, and makes supplication—and what is it?

It is a thanksgiving, not a confession: a thanksgiving for his own virtues: a boastful self-vaunting, and comparison of his good with others' evil!

Afar off, as unworthy to draw near where God is, there stands a sinner—one whom men point at as an outcast and an alien from Israel—and he dares not to lift so much as his eyes toward Heaven, but can only smite upon his breast, and say, "God be merciful to me a sinner!" The pent-up sins of years are gathered, as it were, into one single utterance, and he plunges in, as all-defiled and all-guilty, into the fountain opened in the blood of Jesus for sin and for uncleanness.

And it is he—it is the poor sinner—who goes down to his house justified! The other came, and the other returns, self-complacent, self-satisfied, self-admiring: but this one, the altogether sinner, has upon him the hand of blessing, has within him the answer of the Divine forgiveness.

It is the Gospel of the sinner. He who thus spake is of right the sinner's Friend.

3. Again, Christ claimed for himself this title by his conduct to sinners during his life below.

(1) The common reproach against Him was well-founded. He did eat and drink with publicans

and sinners. No door was ever closed where He sate and rested: no rude repulse ever met, where He was, the application of the needy or the access of the sinful. If the Pharisee would have Jesus, he must have sinners with Him at his table; and if he complained, he drew down upon himself the one only severity of the Saviour—that which exposed self-deception and rebuked hypocrisy.

So was it when, into the house of Simon the Pharisee, there came in after Him, unbidden and unregarded, a woman who was a sinner. Her presence, no doubt, was an affront to the sleek, self-satisfied host: she was a sinner—known for such, no doubt, by common rumour—she was not a fit associate for the decorous and religious world—why was she there? What brought, what detained her? She is weeping there behind the feet of Jesus—washing his feet with her tears, and wiping them with the hair of her head. The Pharisee draws from his tolerance of her an unfavourable inference. "If He were a Prophet, He would have known" her character, and treated her with the abhorrence which she deserved. But the sinner's Friend "had something to say" to the man who thus argued. Two persons owed money to

the same creditor—one a large, the other a trifling sum: neither can pay—both are excused: which will love him most? The Pharisee himself has to say that he supposes the one whose debt was the larger. True—then this woman will naturally love more than Simon? This poor, despised, guilty outcast, having been forgiven a heavier debt of sin, will be more thankful, and more devoted in her love, than he who in his own idea owed God nothing? Yes, the Saviour might come into that house of the Pharisee, and no signs of peculiar honour shall greet or repay his presence—no water for the feet—no anointing of oil—no reverent kiss of welcome: this is natural, for Simon feels himself no sinner, nor counts it, therefore, any great thing if he be privileged to entertain the sinner's Friend. And natural too was it, on the same principle, that this poor sinful woman should honour Him; that she who had been much forgiven should love much that Lord who was to buy her pardon with his most precious blood. She is the forgiven one—she the saint.

(2) Sometimes the person in question is not only a general but a particular sinner. There was a person brought to Jesus in the Temple-courts

by the Scribes and Pharisees to see what He would say to her. She was a person guilty of a most heinous sin, and they, her enemies and his, would fain draw from Him, by his treatment of her case, something which they might make merchandise of, as an expression of dissatisfaction or variance with the Mosaic Law. "The Law commands that such should be stoned: but what sayest Thou?" He must either sign the warrant of execution, or else set himself up as a rival legislator to Moses. The wisdom of God is not thus limited. There is a third course. "He that is without sin among you," such is his answer, late but timely, to the accusers' question, "let him first cast a stone at her." She is guilty—she deserves the penalty—but who shall be the executioner? Whose hand shall be first upon her to put her to death? Surely the hand of the sinless; the hand of him whose conscience bears against himself no accusing witness: if there be one among you—perhaps there is one—whose soul is clear in this matter—whose life is free and his heart pure from the sin of uncleanness—he is the proper person to execute vengeance upon her, who unquestionably deserves to die! And, strange to say, among all

those Scribes and among all those Pharisees—teachers of the divine law, and "simular men of virtue" as they were—there was not one who could accept the challenge; not one who could say, "My life is clear and my heart pure—I will throw the first stone." They went out, convicted by their own consciences, beginning at the eldest even unto the last, till Jesus was left alone, and the woman standing in the midst. Then at last, face to face with that guilty one whom He had delivered from the human vengeance, He brought her into that truer and higher court, for which they, the human accusers, had cared nothing, and in the very act of absolving, added also the highest of all motives for reformation, when He said, "Neither do I condemn thee: go and sin no more." Yes, He who thus dealt with guilt was in deed and in truth the sinner's Friend.

(3) And surely not for nothing was one of the latest acts of that Divine life an act of tenderness towards a sinner. On the cross itself Jesus claimed, and proved his claim to, this title. Beside Him there hung a dying malefactor, placed there, no doubt, to add to the shame of the sinner's Friend; and that the Scripture might be

fulfilled which said, "And He was numbered with the transgressors." The man was dying uncheered by one ray of comfort: he was not innocent—he was not a martyr—he was not witnessing to a truth, nor confessing a Saviour—he was simply being executed—executed for a great crime, and dying for it by slow degrees, through long-protracted hours. But in him, at the eleventh, yea, at the twelfth hour, grace wrought, and wrought wonders. When his comrade, the third sufferer, railed on Jesus—bidding Him, half in mockery, put forth his Divine power, if He possessed it, in saving himself and them—this man rebuked him: this man spoke of the fear of God: acknowledged the justice of his sentence: confessed, too, the innocence of Jesus, and even turned to Him, a dying Man, spoke of his kingdom, and craved his remembrance in the day of his glory. Sinner as he was, and dying for his sin—hardened through long years of iniquity, yet now suddenly (as it should seem) brought to a sense of sin, and to a genuine heart-deep repentance—Jesus saw in him one of those for whom He was pouring out his precious blood; saw in him (as it is written) of the travail of his soul, and was satis-

fied; and left for ever on record a proof of the omnipotence of his grace, in the words, as of a Prince, an Arbiter, and a Judge, "Verily I say unto thee, To-day shalt thou be with me in Paradise." To-day shalt thou be my companion in those realms of the blessed dead, from whence there shall be also, in due season, a resurrection of light and life and immortality.

4. And now can we carry yet one step further the revelation of this character of the sinner's Friend? Can we show that death certainly had no effect upon it? that the risen Jesus, yea, that the ascended Jesus, was, and is still, the sinner's Friend?

Blessed be God, the Gospel Book closes not with even that latest manifestation, in death itself, of the Saviour's spirit, but goes on to show that it abode with Him through death and the grave; awoke with Him in resurrection, and with Him ascended into the heavens.

(1) To whom did He first appear after his resurrection? Was it not, St. Mark being the witness, to Mary Magdalene, out of whom He had cast seven devils?

(2) And to whom did He vouchsafe one of the

most remarkable of all the evidences that it was indeed, in all the fulness and reality of his Person, He himself alive from the dead? Was it not to the Apostle who doubted? to him who had said, in the workings of a self-will surely not without blame, Except I see this and this—see it for myself, and touch also, and handle—I will not believe? Was not this a mark of his consideration still for human weakness—of his mercy still upon human sin?

(3) And at all events what can we say of the special grace vouchsafed to the Apostle Peter, when, after his threefold fall, so full of pain and grief to his Master in the last hours of his earthly strife, he was specially sought out by his Master's presence after the Resurrection, and called thrice to confess his love for Him whom in his latest sorrow he had thrice denied?

These three records make the risen Saviour especially the sinner's Friend.

(4) And what shall we say of one yet later? of one which reveals Him to us in Heaven, at the right hand of God, and tells us of his merciful dealing with a man who had "compassed sea and land" to destroy and make havoc of the faith of a

crucified Lord? Well may that man say, in one of his last communications to the Churches, "This is a faithful saying, and worthy of all acceptation, that Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners, of whom I am chief. Howbeit for this cause I obtained mercy, that in me first Jesus Christ might show forth all long-suffering, for a pattern to them who should hereafter believe on Him to life everlasting."

(5) And "Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, and to-day, and for ever."

What is his work, what his office, now? Is it not that of a Priest? that of One charged with the whole burden of human sin, perverseness, and misery, that He may both make intercession for it perpetually with God, and also strive with it by constant influences of grace and good within? What is the office of the Intercessor, and what is the office of the Minister of the Holy Ghost to man, save the undying ministry of the sinner's Friend?

There are certain things necessary to this office: and with the brief mention of them we will conclude.

(1) The sinner's Friend must himself be free from all spot and stain of sin.

It is a mistake, though a common one, to imagine that sympathy with the sinner can only be gained by intermixture with his sin.

Just in proportion as there is sin, there is no sympathy. Sin is selfishness; and he who has tasted himself of the forbidden fruit, always desires to give of it to others also. It was so in the first sin: it is so still, and always. Sympathy is not increased, it is destroyed, by participation in the sin.

"Such an High Priest became us, who is holy, harmless, undefiled, and separate from sin." If He were not himself holy and sinless, He could not in reality be the Friend of the sinful. There would be in Him a taint and bias of sinful privity and sinful concurrence, which would not strengthen but destroy the reality of the Divine sympathy.

(2) Nevertheless, in the second place, the sinner's Friend must be able to feel for, and to feel with, the sinner.

He must partake of the nature, or He could not feel for the fallen. He must himself have been "tempted in all points," or He could not be "a

merciful and faithful High Priest to make reconciliation for the sins of the people." "We have not an High Priest who cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

(3) The sinner's Friend must be Almighty to save.

What is a sinner?

i. He is one who has a load upon him—the load of unforgiven iniquity; the burden of good things which he has left undone, and cannot do—the burden of evil things which he has done, and cannot by tears or pains or efforts make undone.

The sinner's Friend must be able to take this load off from him; to say, I have borne thy transgressions—I have carried thy sorrows—I have done, and I have undone—I have wrought for thee a perfect righteousness—I have cancelled for thee the accusing debt of sin.

This is what Jesus Christ has done, once for all, for us, on the cross of atonement and of expiation.

ii. Again, a sinner is one who has an infirmity: an inability to please God; a fatal weakness towards that which is good, and a fatal predisposition towards that which is evil; insomuch that, if for-

given, he cannot walk uprightly; if ransomed from the hand of the enemy, he will again fall into it, and be a second and a third and a thousandth time captive.

The sinner's Friend must be able to undertake for him in the future; to say, I am thy Life—I will live in thee—I will communicate to thee day by day a new spirit—I will work in thee both to will and to do—I will make my strength perfect in thy weakness—I will make thee more than conqueror through him that loved thee.

This is what Jesus Christ does for all who come to Him; by virtue of his constant intercession, his prevailing grace, his indwelling Spirit.

(4) Finally—and I place this by itself—the sinner's Friend must be always accessible.

The emergencies of life, of the spiritual life not least, are unforeseen and sudden. If we could only approach the mercy-seat on one day in the year, or at one hour in the day, we might perish between times, no one regarding. We want an ear ever open, a heart ever listening and ever prompt to feel. The sinner's Friend must be as constantly accessible as the sinner himself is ever weak and ever tempted. He must say, At what-

ever hour, of the day or of the night, the enemy draws nigh, come to me instantly and fear not. Whether it be "the pestilence that walketh in darkness," or whether it be "the sickness that destroyeth at noonday"—in either case, and in every case, I am thy refuge—"I am thy shield, and thine exceeding great reward." The name of Christ is a strong tower: the sinner runneth into it, and is safe.

We may be reluctant, but Christ is gracious. We may be unbelieving, but He abideth faithful. The sinner's Friend is himself all-holy: the sinner's Friend is touched with our infirmities: the sinner's Friend is Almighty to save: the sinner's Friend is ever accessible, ever near, ever present.

"How shall we escape, if we neglect so great salvation?"

XII.

CAST OUT AND FOUND.

"And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him."—John ix. 38.

THE man spoken of was one who, having been blind from his birth, had lately received sight under the healing hand of Christ. One of those casual meetings—as we call them—which are sometimes so full of significance both in the natural and in the spiritual life of man; one of those casual meetings which sometimes bring a weak man into the society of a tempter, or (on the other hand) a faulty man into the company of one who is to be, under God, his evangelist and guide towards Heaven; had here thrown a person into the way of Jesus. "As Jesus passed by," from a scene of rebuke and blasphemy and intended violence,

"He saw a man which was blind from his birth." Viewed on the one side, it was a chance meeting: viewed on the other side, it was anything rather: it was the working out in time of an eternal purpose: it was the revelation in act of a mystery hid through long generations: it was the hand of grace seeking out its destined object: it was the bringing of a spoilt life and a blinded soul into his presence, through whom "the works of God should be made manifest in him."

And the result had followed. Through a process which we must in reason regard as rather typical than remedial—a process of anointing the eyes with clay, and then of washing in a common pool; just enough to furnish a connecting link, as it were, between the will that wrought and the miracle which resulted; to show a carnal mind that the work was Christ's and not another's, without in the smallest degree explaining how He wrought—the man blind from his birth came back from Siloam seeing. And this return, in which benevolence should have rejoiced, and for which piety should have given thanks, was the signal for a new outbreak of that hostile malevolence against the Saviour himself, of which this Gospel furnishes

so many graphic descriptions. A system of questioning and cross-questioning and re-questioning is adopted by the Pharisees towards this plain unlettered man, which could end in nothing but the triumph of truth, and the discomfiture of malice; the gradual refining and elevating of a mind honest but ignorant, and the discovery of that bad motive in the breast of the judges, which betrayed itself, sometimes in the tone of an affected eagerness for information, sometimes in the profession of a disinterested candour, more often in the language of utter contempt, cold sarcasm, or vulgar threatening. At last, all attempts to shake the fact or to intimidate the witness having been frustrated and brought to nought, the sentence of excommunication was formally pronounced; and he who would confess Christ—though it were but in the bare statement (unaccompanied by any inference) of truth and fact—must pay the penalty of his honest boldness, by being cast out from the communion of his nation's worship, from the approval of all whom he had been taught to reverence, and the sympathy of every one whom he had to love. "They cast him out."

"Jesus heard that they had cast him out:

and when He had found him, He said unto him," &c.

1. We have here an illustration of Christ's *choice of seasons* for his deepest personal intercourse with souls. "Jesus heard that they had cast him out:" it was then that "He found him." When all else is lost, then is the great finding. Jesus found him, and he found Jesus. It is more than a parable. It is a simple fact, made true over and over again in that spiritual world which has its laws and its events, its battles and its victories, as truly, as certainly, as any that are going on in the world of flesh and blood; only just with a veil over them; just with that little film of sense to obscure them, which in reality rests far more upon the eye that looks than upon the object looked on. How true is it, that it is when men have cast out, that Jesus finds!

There is something very fascinating in the good opinion of others. It makes life smooth, of itself. Many things may go against a man: fortune may have been fickle, health precarious, home-comforts few, ambitious hopes disappointed, heart's wishes crushed and mortified. Still, if men speak well of him; if he is looked up to as a wise man, as a great example or a great authority; if there is the

slightest chance of his being remembered when he is gone, or quoted when he is in dust; you feel that that man is not entirely to be commiserated: his very losses are gains: men have not cast him out for them, but rather added them to his claims to honour. The very blasts of this world's sorrow which have shaken that man's dwelling, bared his garden of flowers, and his orchard of fruits, have but wrapped more tightly round him the mantle of his self-esteem: men have not cast him out: the storms of life have only driven him in!

Contrast this condition with another.

A man has done something wrong. Self-confidence, and vanity, and careless living, have ended (as they end every day) in a dreadful fall. A man has erred from virtue. Sin has found him out in shame. He has broken one of those two or three Divine commandments which the world has taken under its patronage. It mattered not so long as his sins against God were not sins also against the world: but the evil heart could not always be coerced within these exact limits: the poor ignorant boy has stolen; the poor silly girl has listened to the flatteries of a seducer; the weak

purposeless youth has violated in some particular what is called the code of honour; some one not usually weak has been pierced between the joints of the harness, by an arrow from some bow drawn almost at a venture by the foe of man: he has fallen, and the world itself cries shame.

We might go yet nearer to the exact case before us, and picture to ourselves a man who has dared to offend the prejudices of that which calls itself the religious world: a man who had once been the idol of a popular party; had seen with its eyes, and spoken with its tongue, of the mysteries of God: crowds had listened, the religious press had applauded: his severer utterances had been called faithful, and his gentler tones had been persuasive as the accents of an Angel. At last he presumed to think a thought of his own; a thought which dived deeper and soared higher into the secrets of Revelation than was the wont of his party: wrong or right—and he thought that he had the Spirit of God—he was now independent: he had broken loose from man's trammels: he had given himself, as he humbly hoped, to a truer and a surer than any human guidance: and as he was led, so he spake, not as pleasing men, but God who trieth

the hearts. Instantly, or by sure degrees, popularity left him: at last he was as a man wondered at: he had gone forth alone into the wilderness in quest of God: and men cast him out!

It matters not in what particular direction we seek our illustration of the state spoken of: this we say, that, whatever the cause or the manner or the nature of the casting out, that is the condition not least but most favourable to the finding of, to the finding by, the Saviour. "Jesus heard that they had cast him out: and when He had found him, He said unto him."

There is around all of us by nature a thick massive coating of pride and self-esteem. It is an easy thing to declaim upon the duty of humility, the loveliness of a lowly spirit, or the beauty of a character divested wholly of self. But the very person who so speaks, speaks perhaps of that which he knows not. The veiling of pride, the disguising of pride, the limiting and moderating and coercing of pride is one thing—itself not always easy for all men. The putting off of pride, the eradication of pride, the washing or the burning out of pride, from a man's heart, is quite another thing: done, perhaps, but in a few; even in them at last imperfectly,

as well as bitterly and by slow degrees. Nevertheless it must always be in proportion to this divestiture of pride that Jesus Christ finds a man: and it is because the being cast out by the world has a tendency—though not a certain efficacy—in this direction, that it is a state favourable to that finding. A man may be cast out, and yet not found. Even the reproach of the world may foster pride, as well as its flattery. Pride is the common growth of nature: all circumstances favour it till God works: we must not wait for reproach, or, even if it comes, it may not work in us salvation.

But speaking possibly to some who may feel themselves lonely and desolate upon earth; to some who know a little, however little, of reproach and reviling; who have either brought upon themselves the displeasure of others, or have had it thrown upon them unjustly; I would earnestly bid you to ponder with thankfulness this one consideration: that it is when a man is cast out, that Christ is nearest to him; if he be as yet careless, for conversion; if he be already faithful, for strengthening and for consolation. In proportion as you are divested of self-esteem, in proportion as you feel your own poverty and blindness, in the same

degree are you at your best for Christ's converse: look up to Him, feel after Him, cry out to Him, wait for Him, and He himself, even before you call, will answer!

2. We have here an illustration of the *method* of that intercourse of Christ with the soul, of the *season* of which we have spoken.

This man had begun in great ignorance. He did not know who Christ was. He speaks of "a man that is called Jesus." How accurate would that saying be on the lips of many of us! "A man that is called Jesus." A man whom some people talk of as a living Person, as a loving and guiding Friend, as a merciful High Priest, as a compassionate Saviour. I hear the words; but I know Him not for myself, nor understand the thing thus spoken of! It was so once with this man. Even after his cure, he only supposed that "He was a Prophet." We do not read even of a great eagerness to return to bless his Benefactor. "He went his way, and washed, and came seeing." The marvellous fact is soon told, and for the moment it was all. Not until enquiry began, not until he was called to account, and something of opposition and even of persecution threatened him, does anything of deeper feeling

manifest itself, and a tone almost of heroic firmness in the maintenance of truth prepares us for the great and final confession, "Lord, I believe!"

Thus far the lesson before us is that of all Scripture: "To him that hath shall more be given." He who well uses the light he has, shall find that light shining more and more unto the perfect day. He who tells manfully, and acts consistently, what he knows of Christ, shall know more and feel more and love more, until faith itself is lost in sight.

But we would look more carefully into the present converse itself.

"When Jesus found him, He said unto him, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?"

"Thou." The word is emphatic in the original. "Thou—believest thou?"

We are glad to escape into the crowd, and shelter ourselves behind a Church's confession. But a day is coming, in which nothing but an individual faith will carry with it either strength or comfort. It will be idle to say, in a moment of keen personal distress, such as probably lies before us in life, and certainly in death and in judgment, "Every one believes—all around me believe—the

world itself believes in the Son of God:" there is no strength and no help there: the very object of Christ's finding thee and speaking to thee is to bring the question home, "Dost *thou* believe?"

A trying, a fearful moment, when Christ, face to face with man's soul, proposes that question! Perhaps that moment has not yet come to you. You have been fighting it off. You do not wish to come to these close quarters with it. The world does not press you with it. The world is willing enough that you should answer it in the general: and even if you ever say, "I believe in Jesus Christ his only Son our Lord," it shall be in a chorus of voices, almost robbing the individual of personality, and making "I" sound like "We." But if ever your religion is to be a real thing; if ever it is to enable you to do battle with a sin, or to face a mortal risk; if ever it is to be a religion for the hour of death or for the day of judgment; you must have had that question put to you by yourself, and you must have answered it from the heart in one way. Then you will be a real Christian, not before.

What a natural answer! "He said, Who is He, Lord, that I might believe on Him?" Yes, Who

is He? I would fain have some one to love with all my heart, and to trust with all my soul; some one always with me, always the same, tender to feel, wise to guide, strong to save: but who is He? I must see Him; I must apprehend Him; I must hear Him speak, and speak to me; I must be able to speak to Him, and get an answer: Who is He? Tell me, "Who is He, that I might believe on Him?" It is the cry of many hearts: of some, I doubt not, among my readers: it is the cry of many hearts, longing and even fainting for the answer: and it is also the idle utterance of many voices, never giving time nor thought to the great question, and yet grudging evermore because it will not be satisfied; Who will tell me of a Saviour? Who, when He is pointed out, will show me the way to Him? And who, when the way is shown, will convince me that He is no mere phantom, but the ever-living, the Almighty, the all-wise, and the all-sufficing One? These last have not yet been "cast out," that He should "find" them! But the other, the serious, the wrestling, the travailing and heavy-laden, they, when they ask, "Who is He?" shall hear in no long time, from the excellent glory, this strange, this thrilling response,

"Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee."

Seen Him? Already seen Him, and yet not known Him? Yes, seen Him, it may be said to us, in his ordinances, and in his worship; seen Him at his Font and at his Table; seen Him in his Word, and in his works; seen Him in the world and in the Church; seen Him, above all, in the controversies of conscience and in the strivings of his Spirit. Grave rebuke! This was the gate of Heaven, and I knew it not! Yet strong consolation! So near, so present—"that which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, of the Word of Life; for the Life was manifested, and we have seen it . . . that ye also may have fellowship with us—" O strange world! in which Christ moves, invisible yet real! in which He indeed comes unto his own—creatures of his hand, objects of his Redemption—and his own may, if they will, receive Him! Yes, "Thou hast both seen Him, and it is He that talketh with thee!" So, then, I have no new revelation to wait for: the word is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for me into heaven, to bring it to me, that I may

hear it and do it? it is very nigh thee; in thy mouth and in thy heart; that Word, which is Christ himself; that Word, which is at once healing and strength and eternal life!

We take the reply as designed to facilitate acceptance. Who is He? Thou hast seen Him: He is here: He is talking with thee! Thou hast but to receive, but to listen, but to throw thyself upon a present help and a present love; and thou art saved: the Saviour has found thee, and thou hast found a Saviour!

Half and more than half the miseries of our spiritual being would be cured at once by the application of this remedy. "Thou hast seen Him." More near to thee than thou to thyself; more real than the thing thou touchest or the voice thou hearest; more ready for the spirit's sight and for the soul's handling, than the countenance that is dearest to thee or the hand that is nearest; take Him to thee at once! Speak to Him, for He hears! Offer to Him thyself—the best of thine affections, and the best of thine energies—He will accept, He will bless, the sacrifice! A veil there is over Him: for his countenance is as the sun when he shineth in his

strength, and thou couldest not bear the brilliance: his voice is as the voice of many waters, and Angel-hosts tremble at its utterance: in mercy to thee, He flashes not upon thee the lightning of his presence, and "seals up the seven thunders" even while "they utter their voices:" but none the less is He real and present, and the day that is coming shall be just the "unveiling," just the "manifestation," of One whom already thou hast seen, and who already has talked with thee!

"And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped Him."

This man had thought of the Messiah as of some distant, some half-unreal being. Now he found himself in his presence. And that presence was indicated, not now by miraculous signs—not by the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire—but by that still small voice which convinced while it comforted. One sign he had witnessed; the sign of his own healing. From that sign he had argued power, he had argued a mission, he had argued the character of a Prophet. But it was converse with Jesus—it was hearing Him speak—it was the receiving from his lips, in the tone of undoubting truth the assurance of his own Divinity, which drew

from him for the first time the words "I believe!" and the sealing act of worship.

And is it not thus still?

We have all heard of Christ with the hearing of the ear. We have all, for years of life, come together on his holy day to repeat Creeds which tell of Him, and to join in a worship framed on the supposition of his Messiahship. But, after all, it is not thus that a man enters into the faith which saves. Go apart with Him, for one moment, in life's cloudy and dark day: let Him find thee in thy secret chamber, when friends are unkind or adversaries busy: let an earnest cry, wrung from the heart by sore need, call Him to thy rescue, and confess to Him that aching void which none else can fill: and that day, that hour, will be the real date of thy discipleship; the day and the hour at which a creed passed into a faith, and a homage into a devotion; at which the long-heard-of became the late-seen, and the nominal object of thy hope and of thy trust first heard from thy soul the words, "I believe," and first in deed and in truth saw thee worship.

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter."

(1) It says surely to some, *Suspect your prosperity.* The world smiles upon you, the world fawns upon you, and all men speak well of you. It is pleasant. You feel yourselves the happier: nay, you say you feel yourselves the better for it. All the virtues come easily to the prosperous. Good temper, courtesy, gratitude, thanksgiving itself, all seem natural to the happy. And yet, remember, our Lord says, "Woe to you that laugh now!" "Woe to you when all men speak well of you!" Remember too, it was when the man was cast out, that Jesus found him. Suspect your prosperity. Judge yourselves, that you be not judged. The day of your sifting has not yet come: beware lest, when it comes, it find you practically without a faith and without a Saviour!

(2) And to others it says, *Accept your adversity.* You are poor, you are sick, you are lonely, you have fallen from a better standing, you have come back (it may be) a childless widow to a place which you left a wife and a mother—these reverses are, every day, amongst us—all things are

against you, and you are ready to say to your Lord himself, "Show me wherefore Thou contendest with me." Now then think of him who was "cast out" as sinful and vile and refuse, and whom then, just because He had heard that men had cast him out, Jesus found, communed with, and saved. Hear that same voice in your solitude, and let it say to you, "It is thy Saviour that talketh with thee!"

(3) And to others it says, *Do not miss salvation by looking too far for it.* Naaman thought it a small thing to wash in Jordan: the cleansing of the leper, he said, must be a greater matter than that. And so men fancy that to find a Saviour must be a matter of difficulty; of wide and distant and long research: they never can believe that one simple word, spoken from the heart, in a common room, on a common day, can really bring them face to face with the Redeemer and the Saviour and the Comforter. And yet it is even so. When He is found, it is as One whom we have already seen and talked with; as One so near to us that we might have received Him any day; so near to us that there is even now but a step, but a veil, between us

and Him. It is a grievous thing to miss One who is as close to us as our own soul, just because we would take it for granted that He must be looked for afar off.

(4) Finally, to us and to all the history says, *Christ is all.* "He that hath the Son hath life: He that hath not the Son of God hath not life." *He* opened the eyes, *He* came in quest, *He* found, *He* spake: and his question was, "Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" Just that—nothing more. Then what of us, who can do everything else, and yet do not believe? What of us, who say, "God will not condemn me, because I am moral, because I am a payer of just debts, because I am regular in worship, and never take his name in vain?" Yes, but *are you a Christian?* Do you believe on the Son of God? Do you say from the heart to Christ, "Lord, I believe," and worship Him? Many Christians (so called) are only Deists: they believe in God, but they believe not in Christ. Friends and brethren, let us look into it while we may! Soon, this chapter tells us so, soon "the night cometh, when no man can work." While we have the light, let us walk in the light. Everything that offends, cut

it off: everything that offends, pluck it out. From a death-bed, or from beyond death, you will look back with satisfaction on nothing that was not right. "Lord, I believe: and whatsoever Thou sayest unto me, I will do. Lord, I believe: and though now I see Thee not, yet will I endure as seeing Thee who art invisible. Thy strength is sufficient for me: for Thy strength is made perfect in weakness. When Thou sayest to me, Dost thou believe? give me grace to answer, with a firm faith and a good courage, My Lord and my God!"

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